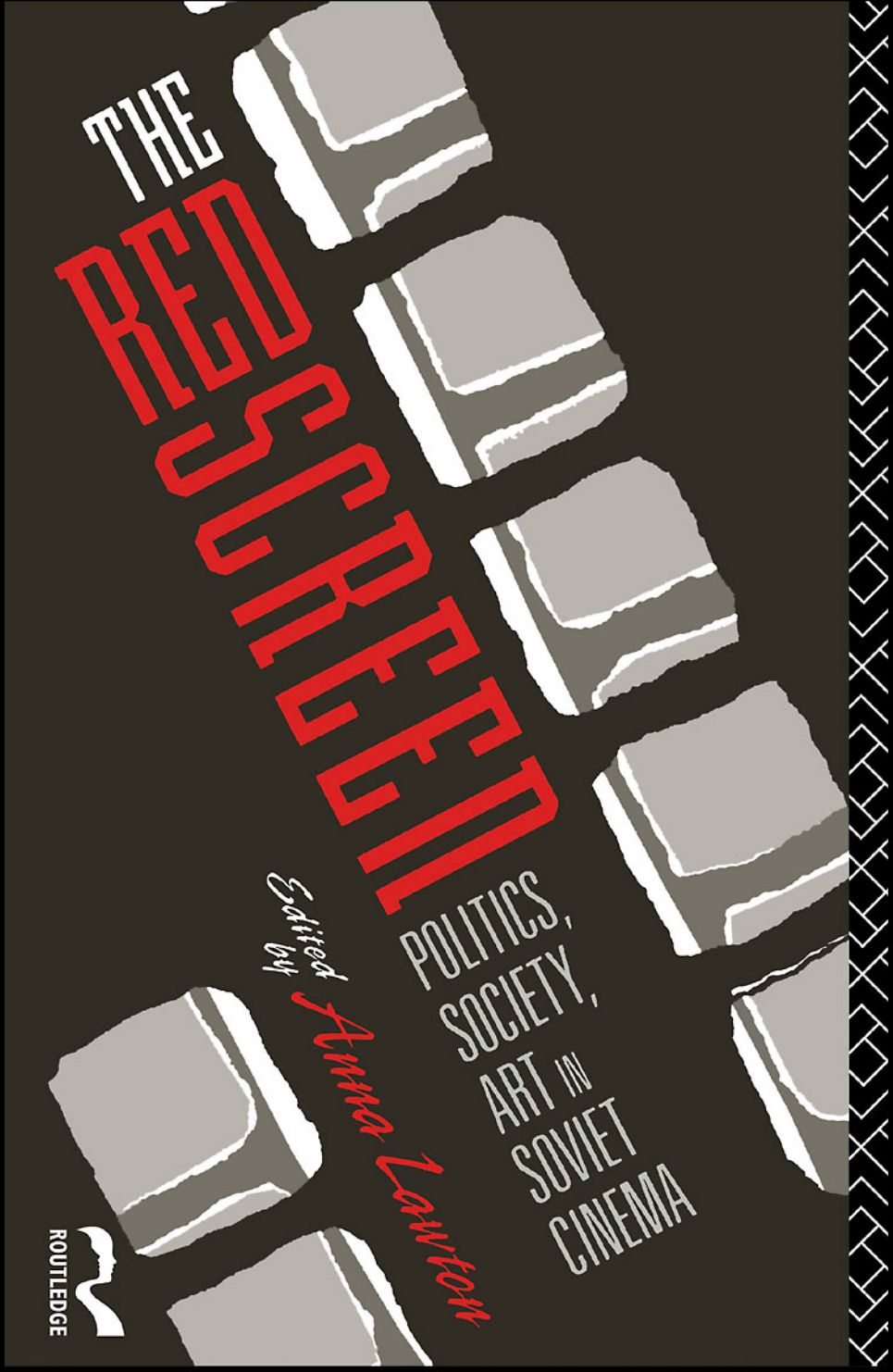

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The Red Screen

POLITICS, SOCIETY, ART IN SOVIET CINEMA

Edited by

ANNA LAWTON

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Introduction: An Interpretive Survey

ANNA LAWTON

Most of the essays included in the present volume were generated from papers presented at the Conference on Soviet Cinema, held at the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies of The Woodrow Wilson Center in September 1986. This was the first gathering of international Soviet cinema scholars to take place in the United States. The conference participants came from France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union to meet with American colleagues. At the dawning of change in the Soviet Union the film industry was in the vanguard of reforms, and the conference was intended to provide a historical perspective to the new developments. Later, two more essays were added to the collection to bring it up to date. The resulting volume is unique in its scope, encompassing seventy years of cinema history from the point of view of twenty scholars of different backgrounds and nationalities. While not pretending to be an exhaustive history of Soviet cinema, this collection highlights significant moments in chronological order, offering a challenging montage of detailed close-ups rather than a fully developed "panoramic". The reader who is able to follow the jump-cuts in between the essays will acquire a broader knowledge of Soviet cinema and a deeper understanding of its aesthetic developments and sociopolitical function. The following introduction is intended to facilitate this process, as well as to place each essay in its proper context.[1]

Everyone knows that a picture is worth a thousand words. If this is true, motion pictures are worth many thousands of words, perhaps millions. It is therefore not surprising that the characteristic features of film language have been the subject of discussion for almost a century. In particular, attempts have been made to identify the *what* and the *how* involved in making a

picture as well as the response that the picture in question is designed to elicit in the viewer.

Needless to say, film language presupposes a communication system that extends far beyond aesthetic considerations. Among the arts, cinema occupies a peculiar position. While it can attain the higher spheres of artistic expression, it remains primarily a genre of popular entertainment, as it was at its very beginnings. At the turn of the century, the newly born cinema was looked down upon as a technological oddity, something akin to a sidewalk show or an attraction for the country fair. For this very reason, however, it enjoyed immense popularity. This fact was noted by the avant-garde groups which made the democratization of art an important goal in their programs, and cinema was accordingly hailed as the new century's art *par excellence*. Rebellious artists and poets began experimenting with the new medium. But a curious phenomenon occurred, following a pattern common to the other arts subjected to the "democratization" process. While laying the foundations of cinema aesthetics, the avant-gardists employed esoteric artistic expression, thereby alienating the very public they claimed to be addressing. The average folk kept flocking to the shows of commercial filmmakers which offered them unpretentious melodramas, amusing comedies and straightforward adventure stories.

While this situation is common to many countries, the Soviet Union has its own peculiarities. After the October Revolution, when cinema changed from popular entertainment into mass spectacle, it acquired some of the functions of the mass media—education and propaganda. The great directors of the 1920s—Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov and Dovzhenko—tried to accomplish three things at one time. As avant-garde artists they developed the aesthetics of cinema in daring experimental styles; as Soviet artists they conveyed the substance of their revolutionary philosophy; as democratic artists they wanted to reach and educate the masses. While they succeeded in the first two tasks, they failed in the third, and their films did not usually appeal to large audiences. They were too difficult, not entertaining enough for the urban population accustomed to the light genres of pre-revolutionary cinema. As for the rural masses who were exposed to the few films shown in their villages by agitational units, they were puzzled, amused or simply frightened, but were certainly unable to decode the film language and make any sense out of what they had seen.

Other directors of the 1920s who are undeservedly little known in the West—including Kuleshov, Ermler, Room, Kozintsev and Trauberg, Eggertand Protazanov—produced popular genres, not devoid of social significance, which fared much better with their audiences.

The beginnings of Soviet cinema and its early developments are discussed in this volume from different perspectives. Kristin Thompson offers the reader a close look at the economic aspects of film production and the practical problems connected with finances. She provides the background for assessing government policies. In light of this essay it is clear that one of the main reasons for fostering popular movies was economic rather than ideological, given the Government's financial difficulties and its need for greater revenues. This view is sustained by Richard Taylor in his study of popular genres. Taylor places the popular movies within a large cultural and political context, and emphasizes the major rôle they played. He focuses on the social impact, which the more artistic or more ideological films lacked. Denise Youngblood gives a rare insight into the world of popular entertainment of the late twenties. She sketches the profile of Fridrikh Ermler, whose realistic melodramas, alert to current social problems, have remained classical models for the *bytovoi,* or "slice of life", film—a genre that was revived in the 1970s. Often attacked by conservative critics, Ermler's films were great popular successes.

Turning the attention to the opposite pole, the avant-garde is the subject of the next two essays. Each author presents a closeup of Dziga Vertov and discusses one of his works. Vlada Petric presents a sophisticated analysis of *The Man with the Movie Camera*—the film that is perhaps the best realization of Vertov's goal of exposing naked reality through cinematic manipulation. Petric highlights the rôle of Vertov's abstract images—which were never popular and were later castigated for their "formalism"—as carriers of a sociopolitical message. This message consisted of Vertov's own views on society as well as on filmmaking, since *The Man with the Movie Camera* was his only independent work. All his other films were commissioned by government agencies and had a more propagandists slant. One of them, *Three Songs of Lenin,* commissioned for the tenth anniversary of Lenin's death, is here discussed by Annette Michelson. Like Petric, she focuses on film aesthetics and relates the film's structure and style to a religious art

form—icon painting. Michelson suggests that this "kinetic icon" was meant to impress in the people's mind a canonized image of the deceased leader. In the pendulum swing between popular genres and avant-garde, Vance Kepley's essay occupies a middle ground. It deals with the figure of Lev Kuleshov, whose experiments with the medium went hand in hand with his interest in offering appealing narrative structures. Kepley convincingly argues against the commonly held view that Kuleshov's theories and practices were mere borrowings from the "classical" Hollywood cinema. He demonstrates that Kuleshov's conception of cinema took shape in the atmosphere of Russian Constructivism, and that he borrowed only those elements of "Americanism"—dynamism, energy, and economy—that fit into the Constructivist philosophical frame.

Toward the end of the decade, government pressure for movies with a strong public appeal increased. This marked the beginning of a campaign against "formalism", which was to be gradually intensified over the next twenty years. In the 1930s a few avantgarde films were still being made by the pioneers of the previous decade, who were now experimenting with sound—notably Dziga Vertov. But they did not constitute a dominant trend. With the centralization of power and the proclamation of socialist realism as the only accepted style, film language became simpler and transparent. The plot of the old bourgeois melodrama was replaced by tales of shock-brigade accomplishments and collective-farm idylls, but the conventions of the genre remained firmly in place and accounted for popular success. Musicals were also extremely popular—Grigorii Aleksandrov's fame rests on this genre—offering a welcome escape from the grim realities of the day. By catering to the public taste, the authorities used entertainment as slick propaganda. Perhaps more than ever, the cinema of the 1930s deserved the epithet of the "factory of illusions".

The Second World War—or the Great Patriotic War as it is known in the Soviet Union—while having catastrophic consequences on the economy and society at large, had at least one positive effect on cinema. With the evacuation of the major studios to Central Asia, cinema acquired a modest measure of autonomy. Far removed from the central power, and working in rather primitive conditions, filmmakers displayed more inventiveness. The most conspicuous product of that period is

Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible,* which eventually incurred the wrath of censors and critics. But there is a plethora of minor films, virtually unknown in the West, which dealt with current issues and enjoyed the favor of the public and the press. The Great Patriotic War provided the subject matter for an endless series of war movies which have become the staple of Soviet cinema up to the 1980s. It is true, however, that the filmmakers' attitude toward the war changed over the years. In the 1940s filmmakers responded with genuine enthusiasm to the call to defend the Motherland, and in their films they stressed patriotism, military heroism, and dedication to the cause. Besides regular feature films, the old Civil War *agitki* were revived in the form of the so-called "albums" *(kinosborniki)*. These were collections of short films in all forms and styles—from farce to tragedy—whose common aim was to make a forceful statement against the Nazi invaders. The best talent among directors, writers, designers, and composers was involved in the production of "albums"—Pudovkin, Mark Donskoi, Aleksandrov, Mikhail Sholokhov, Konstantin Simonov and Dmitry Shostakovich, to name only a few. In those years the feature length documentary was also revived with considerable success, although not along the lines of Vertov's avant-garde method. In fact Vertov had practically disappeared, having been relegated to the rôle of a rank-and-file editor. In 1943 documentarist Leonid Varlamov won an Academy Award in Hollywood with his film *Moscow Strikes Back*. This marked both a recognition of Soviet cinema on the international scene after a decade of silence and the auspicious beginnings of a wartime romance between the two superpowers. Peter Kenez in his essay discusses Soviet cinema of the war years in relation to both the country's internal situation and the international scene. He assesses the peculiar qualities of Soviet films by comparing them with similar productions of the other belligerent nations.

The ensuing Cold War was responsible for an anti-American trend—which was amply matched by an anti-Soviet trend in Hollywood—involving a large number of spy movies. Production values plunged while perfunctory films were made merely to reinforce the xenophobia connected with the latest round of the purges, and to reinforce Stalin's cult of personality. When Khrushchev set out to dismantle the Stalin myth, he pointed to cinema as the most obvious example of image manipulation: "Let us take, for instance, our historical and military films and

some literary creations; they make us feel sick. Their true objective is the propagation of the theme of praising Stalin as a military genius." He also referred to what can aptly be called the cinematic "Potemkin façade" of the Stalin regime: "Stalin knew the country and agriculture only from films. And these films had dressed up and beautified the existing situation in agriculture. Many films so pictured collective farm life that the tables groaned beneath the weight of turkey and geese. Evidently Stalin thought that it was actually so."[2] Whether Stalin actually did is a moot point marginal to our argument. What concerns us is the fact that the cinematic image became subservient to a political purpose.

It was not until the cultural renaissance of the late 1950s that Soviet cinema was able to break out of its constrictive models and find a new form of discourse. By that time a new generation of talented filmmakers was emerging next to the old guard who had survived the preceding two decades. Thus the beginning of the 1960s witnessed the appearance of *The Cranes Are Flying* by the experienced Mikhail Kalatozov, and *Ballad of a Soldier* by the newcomer Grigori Chikhrai; *The Lady with the Dog* by the old master Iosif Kheifits, and *Seriozha* by the young directors Danelia and Talankin; *What If It's Love?* by the veteran director Iuli Raizman, and *Ivan's Childhood* by the beginner Andrei Tarkovsky. Numerous other directors who distinguished themselves in the next twenty years had their professional initiation in the electrifying atmosphere of the early 1960s: Andrei Konchalovsky, his brother Nikita Mikhalkov, Elem Klimov, Larisa Shepitko, El'dar Ryazanov, Sergei Paradjanov, Iuri Ilenko, Otar Ioseliani, Tengiz Abuladze, the brothers El'dar and Georgi Shengelaia, Sergei Mikaelian, and others.

Several factors contributed to the dramatic renewal of Soviet film under Khrushchev. First, cultural policies were considerably relaxed. Socialist realism was still the official style, but the parameters for its interpretation and application were greatly expanded—so much so that Jean-Paul Sartre characterized *Ivan's Childhood* as an example of "socialist surrealism". Second, filmmakers were eager to experiment with new themes and new forms as a reaction to the stagnation of the previous decades. The appeal of experimentation went beyond mere aesthetics. It meant the rejection of old lies and the disclosure of the truth—or at least of those aspects of truth that were deemed permissible. Third, the demand of a better educated mass audience for quality

films on sensitive issues usually matched the filmmakers' own search for new directions. Filmmakers and audiences in those years enjoyed a special relationship and shared in the excitement of a common endeavor. Young people, in particular, were attracted by the new cinema and were willing to spend long hours in line and even to pay triple price for a ticket. The success of those films on the thematic level can be explained by a shift from the collective-heroic to the personal-sentimental. The focus was now on the individual, while the sociopolitical context was analyzed in terms of how it affected an individual's life. Even the war was now seen as a backdrop to personal human tragedies. On the aesthetic level, the key to success lay in moderate innovations rather than in radical solutions. The stormy years of the avant-garde were long gone. While a handful of directors were prone to formalistic experimentation, the majority introduced new stylistic and structural devices that did not totally disrupt the viewer's perception of reality. Conventions were challenged but in a gentle way, so that public taste was sharpened without being threatened. Furthermore, after forty years of exposure to film, the average viewer had acquired some notions of film language and could appreciate meaningful violations of the clichés.

Herbert Marshall's essay deals with directors who adopted a more esoteric approach, following in the tradition of the avantgarde. He presents a detailed account of an interesting article by the screenwriter and critic Mikhail Bleiman, previously unavailable in English, which describes the "poetic", or "archaic", school of the 1960s and its main exponents from the Ukraine and the Caucasian republics. Those regions seemed particularly hospitable to a concentration of talent that continued the Dovzhenko line of "poetic" cinema. But there was at least one cinema poet in the north as well—Andrei Tarkovsky, whose work unfortunately is not discussed in the present volume.

Literary classics have always been a rather safe ground for Soviet filmmakers. Once a work was officially recognized as a classic, its ideological soundness was taken for granted. Gifted directors, however, knew how to manipulate a text artfully so as to endow it with an ambiguity of meaning that often questioned established assumptions rather than supported them. Grigori Kozintsev, whose cinematic training goes back to the experimental works of the FEKS group in the 1920s, brought his experience to bear on his later productions. Already in the late 1950s he directed

a very original version of *Don Quixote,* where the central theme about the irrepressible longing of the human spirit for a higher ideal was relevant to contemporary Soviet reality. Later he directed screen versions of two Shakespearian tragedies, *Hamlet* and *King Lear,* both of which, while preserving the universal significance of the original, provided a pointed commentary on national issues. This aspect of Kozintsev's cinematic tragedies is highlighted in Joseph Troncale's essay. Troncale deals with the concept of war implicit in those films, and with the more explicit themes of tyranny, physical and psychological violence, suffering and spiritual rebirth, stressing their relevance to recent Soviet history.

If the 1960s were characterized by creative ferment, the 1970s were characterized by relative artistic stagnation. A more conservative policy on the arts combined with a consumer mentality to give a commercial slant to film production. To attract audiences and meet financial obligations, producers and distributors catered to public taste. Popular genres, such as melodramas, musicals, detective-stories, disaster movies and science fiction flooded the movie houses. This trend was promoted and supported by the highest echelons of the film bureaucracy, pleased with the high profits. Such films skillfully blended entertainment with ideology, offering the public untroubling simpleminded stories meant to sustain the *status quo*—the ultimate example being *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears,* a slick comedy that managed to please the Soviet masses as well as the Government, and even to pick up an Oscar in Hollywood. Ironically, this award crowned Mosfilm's efforts to follow the American model on the commercial path, all the while promoting the national ideology.

But not all filmmakers worked with an eye to the box office. Tarkovsky continued to create art films such as *Solaris, Mirror, Stalker,* which had a small circulation and did not attract a mass audience. Other directors managed to maintain a dialogue with the public and at the same time to produce films well above the level of grey mediocrity. Quality films were made by Shukshin, Abdrashitov and Mindadze, Mikael'ian, Ryazanov, Panfilov, Mikhalkov, Konchalovsky, Shepitko, Asanova, Gogoberidze and others. Walking on the borderline of the permissible, these directors were able to get their works through the quagmire of censorship. But several unsettling films on controversial themes were censored. This was the case with German's *Trial on the Road,*

Klimov's *Agony,* Panfilov's *Theme,* Askol'dov's *Commissar* and Muratova's *Brief Encounters,* which had to wait for the Gorbachev era in order to be released.

Since the mid-1970s several filmmakers have turned their attention to specific social problems, the first among them being the question of women. Woman's position in society, her material and emotional emancipation, her rôle in the family and the workplace, and her relations with man became trendy subjects. While each film of this type reveals a specific point of view—sympathetic or unsympathetic—as a whole they convey the difficulties, disappointments and failures of women frustrated on the job and unfulfilled in their love-lives. This was a bleak picture when compared to the upbeat movies of the 1930s celebrating women's vital energy and well-deserved successes. The reasons for the production of "women's films", their relation to real life conditions, and their intended message are intelligently examined in Francoise Navailh's essay.

John Dunlop focuses on another broad theme—a Russian nationalist tendency that manifests itself in disparate films. The five pictures under scrutiny differ substantially in subject matter, spiritual depth and artistic level, and by no means can be seen as a "school"—unlike, for instance, the literary school of "village prose". Nevertheless, they seem to share what Dunlop identifies as a Russian nationalist slant. The essay argues that the nationalist streak runs counter to official ideology and therefore represents a potential threat to the authorities. Most of the films chosen as examples aptly illustrate this point. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears,* however, can be read as a paean to the fundamental values of Soviet society rooted in the Marxist-Leninist ideology, and as a celebration of the Brezhnev era of "prosperity".

The main trends of the 1970s continued through the first half of the next decade, with minor variations. Among the popular genres, the production of musicals increased. Some simply reflected the demand of young audiences, such as *I Came to Talk,* starring the Soviet pop-music queen Alla Pugacheva. Others, like *Jazzman,* touched lightly on more meaningful issues. *Jazzman* is here discussed by Herbert Eagle in relation to Soviet musicals of the 1930s, to American models, and to jazz itself—a form of popular culture that existed in opposition to stiff official high art. Hence the film carries a mild criticism of myopic officialdom.

As a result of Andropov's drive against corruption and for more efficiency, in the early 1980s an array of films appeared which castigated petty profiteers, swindlers and social parasites. Among them were some witty and very successful pictures such as *Train Station for Two, The Blonde Round the Corner, A Swindler's Saga* and *Blue Mountains*. Together with criticism of internal problems the film industry also focused on foreign policies, and offered the audiences a new brand of propaganda film patterned on the models of Western detective and spy movies. Examples of consumeristic propaganda are *Can-Can in English Garden, The Mystery of Villa Greta, Two Versions of One Accident* and *Flight 222,* to name a few. Val Golovskoy, in his essay, addresses the question of art and propaganda during this period, and affords us a broad look at the production policies and the films produced. His analysis does not go beyond 1985, and therefore it does not take into consideration the changes the Soviet film industry has undergone since Gorbachev came to power. Golovskoy's pessimistic conclusions as to the future of Soviet cinema have by now been contradicted by the most recent developments. Nevertheless this essay stands as the account of a particular moment in history whose time has come to an end.

The middle of the 1980s marked the transition from a conservative gerontocracy to a progressive and dynamic leadership. It did not take long for the effects of this change to be felt on the cultural scene. Gorbachev's new policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* immediately affected many art fields. The Filmmakers Union took a leading rôle in the restructuring process, providing the other art unions with an example to follow. At the 5th Congress of the Filmmakers Union (May 1986), three-quarters of the conservative Union's secretariat was replaced with new members from the creative ranks rather than the bureaucratic apparatus. With the support of Alexander Yakovlev, who at the time was the head of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, the controversial film director Elem Klimov was elected first secretary of the Union. The renewal of the film industry was facilitated by the sweep of the cultural heads in many other institutions, starting with the replacement of the Minister of Culture himself. The new appointee was the well-known film and stage director/actor Nikolai Gubenko. But the most significant step toward the revival of film creativity was the reform of Goskino, the government agency that since 1923 ruled as an unchallenged

despot over all aspects of production and distribution. The new director, Alexander Kamshalov, came from the camp of the Gorbachevites, and was obviously selected to represent the new party policy on the cinema industry. The reshuffling of the administration balanced the scales by increasing the filmmakers' decision-making power. All studios acquired the right to plan their own yearly productions and to move toward self-financing. The Union's policies and goals were put forth in a number of resolutions designed to transform the system of production and distribution, according to a "New Model" consistent with Gorbachev's vision of a global *perestroika*. While the New Model principles were sound, the goals proved to be too ambitious given the critical state of the country at large. By the spring of 1988, the document had been amended forty-two times. And after the 6th Congress of the Filmmakers Union (June 1990), with the drafting of a new platform and a strong push toward privatization, the New Model lost momentum and became history.

As a result of *glasnost,* censorship has been gradually dismantled. The Law on the Press, which took effect on 1 August, 1990, legally abolished the institution of censorship. But in the course of the previous four years censorship had virtually ceased to exist. The first concrete move of the new secretariat was the creation of the Dispute Commission (May 1986) to review films that had been shelved for political reasons. By the end of the decade, some 100 films have allegedly been released. Soviet audiences could finally see *Trial on the Road* (1971), *Brief Encounters* (1967) and *Commissar* (1968) some twenty years after they were made. Films that had been withheld more recently—such as *Theme* (1979), German's *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1983) and Abuladze's *Repentance* (1984)—were also promptly released. These films were not only circulated in the Soviet Union—some aired on national television—but they were also exhibited at several international festivals, garnering awards and rave reviews.

Giovanni Buttafava's essay offers an insightful view into the artistic world of Aleksei German. Buttafava discusses the evolu tion of German's style over fifteen years, with particular attention to *My Friend Ivan Lapshin,* which he considers the most innovative work in recent Soviet cinema. Another product of the cultural thaw, Rolan Bykov's *Scarecrow,* is presented by Aleksander Gershkovich and compared to a blander picture, *Kindergarten* by the poet-turned-director Evgeni Yevtushenko.

Scarecrow was actually released in 1984, but with great trouble and on a limited basis. Its frank look at the problem of juvenile delinquency, and the implication that a tyrannical collective is detrimental to the individual, met with resistance and generated heated controversy. While focusing on contemporary issues, Bykov actually tries to come to grips with the legacy of the Stalinist past, just as German does in a more explicit way.

It is, however, in the film *Repentance* by Tengiz Abuladze that the viewer comes face to face with the years of terror. Even if this film is not the subject of an essay in this volume (or precisely for that) it cannot be ignored given its unprecedented political and moral significance in the history of Soviet cinema. *Repentance* reveals historical truth in a metaphorical way. It is to Abuladze's credit to have sacrificed clarity, and allegedly lost some audiences, in order to remain faithful to his artistic commitment. The narrative structure is disorienting because of time discontinuity and unmarked transitions between reality, dream, memories, and fantasy. All this creates the effect of a "tragic phantasmagoria", as Abuladze himself put it. The author's intent, however, was not to lead the viewer away from reality, but to reveal the truth about an epoch that by its official mendacity, institutionalized hypocrisy, delusions of grandeur, secret trials and absurd executions now appears to be more "phantasmagoric" than any fiction. Abuladze created a surrealist tale of horror and set it in an imaginary time and place to endow it with a universal significance. The central figure, Varlam Aravidze, is the grotesque incarnation of the quintessential dictator. He is a composite caricature of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini, and an allusion to the cinematic "great dictator", Charlie Chaplin. But besides obvious references to historical leaders of opposite political color and identical totalitarian inclination, Varlam is also portrayed as a demonic figure, the true embodiment of evil on the philosophical-religious plane. Evil is insidious, the film warns, and perpetuates itself through the generations. Significantly, Varlam's corpse keeps reappearing as long as the son justifies his father's crimes. *Repentance* implies that it takes a great act of atonement to exorcize the evil conscience of the nation and restore lost moral values.

Repentance is a production of Gruziafilm, the Georgian film studio. Two factors made it possible to get the film past preliminary censorship and into production: the personal support

of Eduard Shevardnadze, who was Georgia's party secretary at the time, and the republic's geographical location. Being far removed from the center, Georgia enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, due in part to the official policy of support for ethnic cultures. Georgian television had a daily three-hour period set aside for local broadcasting, unsupervised by the central Gosteleradio administration. Thus, *Repentance,* made for the blue screen, became an international sensation and a symbol of the new political course. The circumstances of its making testify to the talent, inventiveness and resourcefulness of the Georgian filmmakers, who are regarded as among the best in the Soviet Union.

Lino Micciché's essay acquaints us with an aspect of Soviet cinema that is poorly known in the West: the film industries in the Caucasian and Central Asian republics, and their productions up to 1985. A similar topic is the subject of Sylvie Dallet's essay. But, while Micciché is broader in scope and provides statistical data, Dallet discusses three non-Russian republics and focuses on one theme: the ethnic perception of history as expressed in film.

History is also the theme of Marc Ferro's paper, whose general character may help to sum up the points of the previous essays. Ferro is concerned with the cinematic writing of history, against a cosmopolitan background. While referring mostly to Soviet cinema, he proposes a model for a global classification of films according to their relationship to history.

While the films discussed so far are characteristic of a new era in Soviet politics, they were not actually produced under the Gorbachev administration. *They* were a sign of impending change. Films made after 1985 have by now confirmed the general expectations for creative revival and meaningful topics. Among them are two pictures by Abdrashitov and Mindadze, *Plumbum or a Dangerous Game* and *The Servant;* social and political satires, such as Ryazanov's *Forgotten Melody for Flute,* Shakhnazarov's *Zero City,* Ovcharov's *It,* and Mamin's *Fountain* and *Sideburns;* the "difficult" films of Sokurov, *The Day of the Eclipse* and *Save and Protect,* and Lopushansky's *Visitor to a Museum;* and a whole array of documentary films denouncing history cover-ups—the "white spots"—and current social problems, from drugs and prostitution to the environment. The best known to international audiences is the Latvian documentary *Is It Easy to Be Young?* by Iuris Podniecks.

The last two essays, by young Soviet scholars, offer a view from the Soviet Union. They deal with the changes that took place after 1986, and the difficulties in implementing the new program. Mikhail Brashinsky, in the iconoclastic spirit of *glasnost,* offers a slashing critique of the contemporary scene. Peter Shepotinnik provides some balance with a more optimistic assessment. While it is undeniable that many goals have been achieved, new problems have arisen. The major studios became financially accountable already in the initial stage of the economic reform, but they still operated with Goskino's money. And, while Goskino lost its monopoly on the international market, it maintained its grip on domestic distribution. However, some daring pioneers in the uncharted territory of capitalist enterprise emerged almost immediately. Numerous production and distribution companies have mushroomed all over the country. Their presence soon became a major factor in the economic reshaping of the film industry. The Association of Independent Cinema, including seventy-eight organizations nationwide, was established in 1990. The members cover a wide range, from small co-ops, relatively unknown, to large enterprises headed by top directors such as Sergei Solovev and Nikita Mikhalkov.

At the 6th Congress of the Filmmakers Union, the revolutionary moment seemed to be over. The jubilant mood that marked the historic meeting of 1986 had been replaced by anxiety and frustration. The first item on the agenda was to draft new by-laws to restructure the Union as a federation of independent republican unions, which reflected the direction of the country at large striving for autonomy from the center. As though to confirm this, Elem Klimov, who had been on a leave of absence since the beginning of 1988, was replaced with a new President (no longer a First Secretary) from the republic of Tadzhikistan, Davlat Khudonazarov. The other major goal put forth by the delegates to the Congress for the next decade was the consolidation of private initiative and a free market.

The outgoing secretaries, although often criticized in recent times, had the undeniable merit of giving the film industry a great impetus. They also left a difficult legacy to the present administration. Having blown up the old power structures, they also destroyed the economic safety net. As the country enters a new decade fraught with political turmoil and financial uncertainty, the

new Union's leadership faces the challenge of reconstructing the film industry on a new economic basis.

NOTES

1 The papers originating from the conference were edited and translated from Russian, Italian and French by Alexis Klimoff.

2 From Khrushchev's secret report to the 20th Party Congress (February 1956), as quoted in Jay Leyda, *Kino* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 401.

PART ONE

From Potemkin to the Elbe

CHAPTER 1
Government Policies and Practical Necessities in the Soviet Cinema of the 1920s

KRISTIN THOMPSON

Among scholars in the field of cinema who do not study the Soviet film specifically, a myth seems to persist. Many still believe that the Soviet government's 1919 decree nationalizing the cinema industry automatically meant that the Government undertook to subsidize film production fully. Lunacharsky's universally quoted attribution to Lenin of the comment that the cinema was, for the Soviets, the most important of the arts has come to imply that the State put a high priority on supplying the industry's needs. In this view, the slow recovery of the industry after the Revolution, and even the existence of the montage movement, become attributable primarily to the lack of raw stock and equipment caused by the flight of pre-revolutionary producers and to the hardships of the Civil War period.

A number of historians who have concentrated on economic aspects of the Soviet silent era have shown that the Government gave direct subsidies to the film industry only on a limited and inadequate basis; that from 1921 on the industry was expected to put itself on a self-sufficient footing; and that initially the means by which it was expected to do so was by importing and distributing foreign films.[1]

Revenues from the showing of imported films were crucial to the industry's recovery. Similarly, all new raw stock and equipment, beyond the small supplies available after the Revolution, had to be brought in from capitalist countries. After 1924, government subsidies increased somewhat, with the purchase of one million rubles' worth of stock in Sovkino by various government agencies, although credit and the rental of foreign films remained important to Sovkino's survival. Given these facts, it is desirable to take a

closer look at how the Soviet film industry went about its dealings abroad, and how those dealings related to government policy.

THE CIVIL WAR PERIOD: 1918–21

The Moscow Cinema Committee and the Petrograd Cinema Committee were formed in early 1918. Both needed raw stock to be able to produce films, but little was available. The departure of many pre-revolutionary Russian filmmakers, taking their stock and equipment with them, intensified the problem, and the Moscow Soviet's decree of 17 July 1918 that all raw stock be registered with the city government caused many of those supplies remaining in private hands to be hidden away.[2]

All this set the stage for the appearance of Jacques Cibrario, a private film-dealer who wrote to the Moscow Cinema Committee in May, proposing that he be designated an agent and sent abroad to purchase whatever materials the Committee needed. The Cibrario affair has often been treated primarily as a sort of tragicomic footnote to the history of the early Soviet cinema, but it seems more likely that it was one of the key events of that period. Narkompros (the Commissariat for Public Enlightenment) had just taken over control of the Moscow Cinema Committee (later the VFKO, or All-Russian Photographic and Cinematographic Section of Narkompros) in May, putting Preobrazhensky in charge of it. In July, Preobrazhensky hired Cibrario to go abroad as the Committee's representative. Apparently the million dollars deposited in the National City Bank of New York came from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee; Babitsky and Rimberg mention a successful application to that group by the Committee in 1918.[3] Cibrario travelled to New York City and proceeded to siphon off large portions of the fund through a dozen dummy companies, allegedly with the cooperation of at least one major American equipment firm. The Soviet authorities did not react to the fraud until mid-1921; on 1 August, Cibrario was arrested and charged with appropriating the Soviet government's money; the subsequent lawsuit was eventually thrown out of court in December on the grounds that the United States did not recognize the Soviet government, and hence the latter had no right to use the American legal system.[4]

This episode is one of the few early cases where the Soviet government gave a substantial direct subsidy to the film industry,

and the results were disastrous. The country had little enough precious *valiuta* (foreign currency) on hand without flagrant waste of this sort. Historian Louis Fischer has estimated the total gold reserves on hand in Russia at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution at $500,000,000. Since the holdings were at the same basic level in 1921, we must conclude that few other industries received such favorable gifts of *valiuta,* given that the Soviets were exporting virtually nothing in the years between.[5] When one considers that approximately one five-hundredth of the exportable currency of the new regime was allocated to the rebuilding of the cinema industry, the damage inflicted by Cibrario begins to seem more extensive. Moreover, in 1918, a million dollars would have bought over a thousand professional camera outfits and comparably large quantities of raw stock, processing equipment and finished films. Spent wisely, it would certainly have been enough to outfit several Soviet production units, as well as to provide some foreign films to keep the theaters running.

Nor is there any apparent reason why Committee officials should have made the monumental error of sending an unknown representative into a country that was hostile to the Soviet Union and had no trading relations with it. A far more logical move would have been for some Committee members themselves to go to a much closer and more obvious spot to buy the material: Berlin. Germany had one of the three most important raw-stock manufacturing firms in the world (Agfa), it had a growing domestic production sector, and it boasted a major manufacturer of lighting equipment (Jupiter). Indeed, these are precisely the goods the Soviet industry bought in extensive quantities beginning only four years later.

Moreover, Germany had the obvious advantage of being the only country in the world that had diplomatic and trading relations —albeit somewhat tentative ones—with Soviet Russia as of July 1918. A trade arrangement had been signed in April, in the wake of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. In addition the German film industry was cautiously interested in opening trade relations with Russia. The German-Russian trade agreement led the main German trade paper, the *Lichtbildbühne,* to urge film companies to investigate the possibility of dealing with the Russians before they were beaten to the punch by the French, the Italians and the Americans; it published the address of the new export office in Berlin, where export forms were available.[6] Representatives of the Russian film

industry bearing *valiuta* in the form of German marks might well have been welcomed.

Indeed, the Petrograd Cinema Committee seems to have tried this more pragmatic approach. In late September the *Lichtbildbühne* reported that the large government-supported Universumfilm AG (Ufa) had been negotiating for some time and had finally, after many difficulties, arranged to send its films to Russia, to be distributed by the Petrograd group. Taylor claims that, also during September, the Petrograd Cinema Committee had arranged to buy raw stock from the German Kodak firm, "but it was overruled by the government because it involved too many risks on the Soviet side".[7] Whether these two arrangements were part of the same or separate deals, they had no result—and, in any case, they probably came too late in the First World War ever to have been carried through.

Nevertheless, in retrospect it appears that the only plausible way either the Moscow or Petrograd committees could have made successful purchases abroad would have been to act quickly in the summer of 1918 and buy their supplies in Germany. As it was, the fact that Moscow's million dollars literally went west during the Cibrario affair may well have made the Government reluctant to entrust *valiuta* or any kind of large subsidy to the cinema industry. In this sense, the Cibrario affair could have been a major contributory factor in setting the Soviet film industry's recovery back three or four years.

For the rest of the period of the Civil War economy, the Russians remained diplomatically and economically isolated, with little chance to acquire materials abroad legally. The nationalization decree of 27 August 1919 worsened the raw-stock situation as more private cinema producers emigrated. The nationalization culminated, Taylor argues, with the decision on 5 November 1920 to pay cinema workers with state funds. Given that most resources were going into the military at this point, the subsidy was minimal. In other nationalized industries, the "wages" were given in the form of rations and services, and the same was probably often the case in the film industry.[8] Since the Government also had made theater admissions either free or very cheap during the Civil War period, the film industry had no way to build up capital. It survived by showing old films, making new ones on what little raw stock was available, and buying smuggled foreign goods.

THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY: THE GOVERNMENT AND THE FILM INDUSTRY

During the entire NEP period—which for the film industry lasted effectively until about 1931—the Government's main policy in relation to film was to try to create a central organ which could regulate and coordinate the activities of the various private and regional film companies and which could itself make and distribute films with the type of ideology desirable for the new Soviet society. At every stage through the changes of the VFKO into Goskino (1922) and Goskino into Sovkino (1924–5), the goal was for the Soviet film industry to become self-supporting and to make a profit. This profit could then be used to expand the industry, particularly by setting up thousands of exhibition facilities to serve the far-flung regions of the Soviet Union—that is, the "cinefication" project. At every stage, the Government's lack of ability or inclination to subsidize the film industry caused problems—either through a basic weakness in the industry itself, or through a perceived overdependence on the import-export trade with capitalist companies abroad.

The NEP was announced in March 1921, it was gradually introduced over the next few months, and it was declared officially on 9 August 1921. The main immediate impact of NEP on the film industry was local: the resurfacing of hoarded raw stock, distribution prints, and equipment—though not in quantities sufficient to create a wide expansion of the industry—and the formation of a number of small private firms.

The beginning of the NEP was followed by the Anglo-Russian Trade Agreement of 24 June 1921, an agreement that effectively broke the Allied blockade of Soviet exportation of goods and gold. By the end of 1921, Russia had signed trade agreements with a number of other nations, including Germany.[9] One might expect that another attempt by the film industry to buy goods abroad might have occurred at about this time, yet none did. Possibly there was still hope that part of Cibrario's million dollars could be recovered through the American courts—though when that hope was dashed in December there was no new allocation of *valiuta* by the Government to allow the film industry to buy a large quantity of stock and equipment abroad. Moreover, during 1921 the foreign film press was remarkably silent on the prospect of renewed trade with Russia. One of Britain's leading trade papers,

The Bioscope, for example, made no reference to the topic during 1921. I suspect that the European film industry was far more concerned in 1921 with the struggle against the newly dominant Hollywood cinema, and with the prospect of a feared "German invasion" of exports, than with the dubious possibilities of film trade with Russia.

The only country that seemed seriously interested in trade with the Soviets was Germany, and commentators there were cautious. The editor of the *Lichtbildbühne* noted on 23 October 1920 that the British and the Russians were negotiating, and concluded vaguely that "The German film industry must study the basic Russian situation and keep track of the progress of things with unceasing vigilance, if it doesn't want to be too late".[10] When Lenin announced the NEP, the *Lichtbildbühne* recommended that German companies send representatives to Russia to ascertain its film needs, since "it is only a question of time until German films come to Russia".[11] But it was only after the Treaty of Rapallo was signed in April 1922 that legal German-Soviet film trade began. The Soviet film industry's breakthrough in its import-export situation, and hence in its general recovery, occurred at that time.

Despite the slow recovery in the film industry created by the NEP, governmental policy and neglect hindered its benefits. In 1924 historian Nikolai Lebedev complained:

> If the Party had, in good time, at the beginning of NEP, evaluated the significance of the film industry and had assigned to this area a sufficient number of organizers on a sufficient scale, we would at the present time have not only a profitable Soviet film industry, but we would have been quite capable, technically, of organizing the production of new films filled with revolutionary content.

The VFKO, he concluded, was not able to control the NEP in film.[12] The theaters suffered particularly. In place of the policy of free or cheap admissions coupled with government subsidies, which had characterized the Civil War period, high ticket-prices were put in to effect; as a result, many governmental and communal organizations had to reduce the number of screens they controlled, and private theaters spread.[13] Yet various governmental bodies also hoped to derive an income from the film industry, and local taxes were imposed on tickets; these varied from place to place and

were usually high: "many provincial Soviets did not picture the cinema as anything but an unlimited source of revenues and misunderstood its cultural and educational importance". Goskino determined in the 1923–4 season that theaters with over 600 seats were averaging a 9.5 percent profit, while smaller ones were typically operating 30 percent in the red.[14] Such a state of affairs would further encourage the move toward larger, privately owned commercial cinemas and away from the smaller workers' theaters. A survey presented at the 13th Party Congress in 1924 revealed a consistent and precipitous decline in the number of cinemas operating in various regions. In early 1924 the Urals-Siberia region had only 20 percent as many screens as in 1917, and other areas showed similar trends: the Samarsk region had 20 percent, Tashkent 50 percent, Saratov 30 percent, and so on.[15] The crisis was considerably alleviated in May 1924, when the Council of People's Commissars set the ceilings on state cinema taxes at 10 percent and on local taxes at 5 percent.[16] This move no doubt bolstered the recovery of the industry which was under way that year, but it again highlighted the fact that government policy had handicapped that recovery during its difficult initial years.

Why such a lack of aid to the cinema industry in this crucial period? Taylor suggests that the Party was simply not that interested in film. He finds that *Pravda* published no articles on the subject between 1917 and 1921, then covered it only under its "Theater and Music" heading; it did not receive its own section until September of 1923.[17] Similarly, Marchand and Weinstein, writing in 1925, deplored the Government's failure to take control of the cinema, arguing that most party members were not aware of the medium's potential. They credit the publicity concerning Lenin's 1922 statement to Lunacharsky about cinema, plus Trotsky's 1923 article, "Vodka, the Church, and cinema", as having changed attitudes. In addition, they consider the creation of the Mantsev Committee in September 1923 as an indication of a more serious official attitude towards the film industry.[18]

The Mantsev Committee's inquiry into conditions in the film industry was prompted by the failure of Goskino to organize the private firms, supposedly under its control, and by its failure to produce significant numbers of films. Goskino had been formed by the decree of 19 December 1922, which had transformed the VFKO into a vertically integrated firm with a distribution monopoly. It was supposed to license private companies to

produce; it was to control all importation and to distribute all films. In practice, Goskino was undercapitalized and incapable of operating as designed. As of 1 July 1923, its official capital was 3, 414,000 rubles, but "of this capital, only 0.475 percent is in money, material goods, and in old accounts; all the rest is capital only from the bookkeeping point-of-view".[19] The bulk of this capital was in the form of studios, theaters, laboratories and other facilities which the Government had assigned to Goskino. But these were in poor condition and needed to be repaired before they could be used effectively. The Government could not extend long-term credit, but did apparently assign a cash advance of 20,000 rubles to Goskino. Of this, approximately 17,000 were assigned for repairs to the property, with the other 3,000 going to repair the old Pathé Frères lab taken over during nationalization. Presumably this money had to be paid back out of Goskino's profits. By the beginning of 1924, Goskino had two studios, one laboratory and some other facilities in working order, all of which presumably contributed to the increase in production during that year.[20]

In spite of improvements by 1924—which Marchand and Weinstein credit largely to A.V.Goldobin, who took over the leadership of the company on 15 November 1923[21]—its failures had already been revealed by the Mantsev Committee. These primarily involved Goskino's attempts to get much-needed capital. Unable to establish a state distribution monopoly, Goskino had instead licensed private enterprises, permitting them to make, import and distribute films in exchange for a share of the profit. In a 13 March 1924 interview, N.Plastinin, the head of Kino-Moskva, described the consequences:

> The accumulation of capital for production in the cinema industry is dependent on the rental of foreign films. Since a commercial license and importation expenses are high, it is impossible to buy fewer than six positive copies of a picture abroad. But once you have bought them, you don't know what to do with them in the Soviet Union. Kino-Moskva, because of the monopoly on rentals, is confined to the Moscow region. Two positive prints are sufficient for it. The other four have to be sold to private entrepreneurs or given to Goskino for re-rental on very unfavorable terms.
>
> Thust the rental monopoly, in its present form and application, is strangling Kino-Moskva and all other Soviet

> and public film enterprises and feeding private capital. Goskino takes from the gross income a tax of 10 percent, which is equal to 40 percent of the gross profit.[22]

Lebedev asserts that during 1923 this 10 percent share

> turned out to be a considerable source of income in Goskino's budget.
>
> The second source of income for Goskino was the re-rental of movies that belonged to private enterprises through the apparatus of Gosprokata. It is true that these operations undercut the very principle of monopoly, in fact legalizing private rental, and are more profitable for the entrepreneur than for the government, but still some crumbs fall to Goskino.[23]

The actual increase in production by Goskino itself in 1924 was accomplished mainly through the use of credit to buy supplies abroad.

As a result of the Mantsev Committee's recommendations, Goskino was changed into Sovkino, which began operating 1 March 1925. Government agencies did subsidize Sovkino by purchasing a million rubles in stock. This investment was to help repair production facilities, expand the theater network, and so forth, but more funds were needed, and the industry was expected to support itself thereafter. Leonid Krasin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Trade, pointed out in an interview in *Kino-gazeta* that all companies connected with Sovkino were guaranteed credit: "The growing number of movie-houses in the cities and villages will allow a large distribution of films, the receipts from which will assure companies of the resources necessary for developing their own production."[24] Il'ia Trainin, one of the main policymakers at Sovkino, urged production companies to aid the recovery by repairing studios and hiring new personnel:

> We understand very well that the government is not able at the present time to subsidize this matter on a large scale. Therefore it is necessary for the film organizations that are directly interested in the development of our film education to add to those crumbs which are received from the government.[25]

Even with this change in government policy, the importation and distribution of foreign films remained an important resource for funding the Soviet industry's recovery through the rest of the 1920s. Credit was probably still more important than subsidies.

THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY: FOREIGN TRADE

After the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in April 1922, Lunacharsky and Lenin pursued a policy of trying to interest foreign capitalists in investing money in the Soviet film industry and producing films in Russia. Officials met with little or no luck in their attempts. Most national film industries except for those of the United States and Germany were undercapitalized themselves, and hence were disinclined to invest abroad. Moreover, the biggest American firm, Famous Players-Lasky, had moved extensively into foreign investment and production in 1920 and 1921, building studios in England, Germany and India; all of these had failed by 1922, and estimates of Famous Players-Lasky's losses in Germany alone ranged from one to two million dollars. The experiment seemed to demonstrate that it was safer to avoid foreign entanglements of this sort.[26] Thus, aside from the Western film officials' nervousness about getting involved in Bolshevik Russia, the timing of the Soviet appeal was inauspicious.

For several months in late 1922, however, hopes must have been high. Joseph Schenck, president of the major American film company First National, was reported to be dealing with Soviet government officials during his European tour. Finally, in late December, he announced in Berlin that he had decided against the Soviet offers; the *Lichtbildbühne* reported that he "took the position that the time has not yet come for the American film industry to devote itself to dealing with Russia. The discussions are supposed to be taken up later by Will Hays's organization [i.e. the Motion Picture Producers of America]."[27] There is no indication that Hays ever did negotiate with the Soviets, but this passage suggests that Schenck in effect was speaking for the American industry in rejecting, not only investments, but any "dealing" with Russia. In fact American distributors were not particularly concerned with selling to Russia during the early 1920s. They were still occupied with opening additional branch distribution offices in more accessible markets, and would typically dispose of the

Russian rights to their films to specialized import-export firms in Berlin. Few or no direct sales of American films by American companies to Russian ones took place before 1925. Indeed, as of early 1924, only one American company had even opened its own branch in Berlin, owing to the stringent German quota system, and the Goldwyn office there simply sold the rights to its company's films to local German distributors for circulation in Germany and points east.[28] The rise in the importation of American films into Russia after 1922 parallels to some extent their increased presence on the German market; the stabilization of the mark beginning in late 1923 and the introduction of less stringent quota regulations in 1924 permitted the Hollywood film to increase its share of that market considerably. German import-export firms then passed these films along to Russia.[29] Overall, then, the hopes of Soviet officials for extensive investment, or even interest, on the part of major capitalists abroad were not realized.

Luckily for the Soviet film industry, cooperation was forthcoming from smaller capitalist companies, and one major communist organization in Germany was willing to invest in the Soviet Union. The latter, the Internationale Arbeitershilfe (IAH), was the most significant source of foreign support for the Soviet film industry during this era. It is also the source upon which historians have focused; as some fine accounts of the IAH's relations to Soviet film production and distribution already exist, I shall summarize the IAH only briefly here.[30]

The IAH was formed in August 1921 by the German Communist Party as a means of gathering and dispersing funds and goods intended for famine relief in the Soviet Union. Under the capable and enthusiastic leadership of Willi Muenzenberg, the IAH extended its activities, fostering the creation of branches in many parts of the world; once the famine diminished, the IAH used its resources for other leftist causes, such as supporting striking workers in various countries. Almost from the beginning, the IAH employed films in its work, initially distributing Soviet films on the famine in 1921 to raise funds, and later making and commissioning documentaries on Soviet life. From 1922 on, the IAH sent badly needed raw stock and equipment to Soviet film firms, thus aiding the recovery of the industry there substantially. It also served as the conduit by which the earliest Soviet exports of fiction films reached the West. In 1923 the IAH established a film office in Moscow to aid Soviet production, and in 1924 it set up a

joint production and distribution firm, Mezhrabpom-Russ, along with the private Russian cooperative firm, Russ. The IAH initially controlled 50 percent of the company, then gradually took over Russ's share between 1924 and 1928. In 1925 the IAH formed Prometheus, a German company which distributed many of the Soviet films exported between that year and the company's failure in 1932. The IAH was clearly the most important foreign group with which Soviet film companies dealt during the pre-1925 NEP period, and was also one of the single largest forces in promoting the recovery of the Soviet film industry.

The IAH did not, however, work in complete independence from the commercial cinema industry of Germany, nor was the IAH the only German body with which Soviet firms dealt. The *Lichtbildbühne's* first postwar reports about Russians buying openly in Berlin came shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo. In June an agent, Gregor Rabinovich, bought the rights to the Richard Oswald historical epic *Lady Hamilton* for Fakel, a small private company formed under NEP; *Lady Hamilton* was a major German production, and Oswald's films in general proved very popular in the Soviet Union for the next few years. M. Aleinikov, head of the Russ collective—and later chairman of Mezhrabpom-Film—went to Berlin in August to buy and, if possible, sell films. In the latter mission he apparently succeeded, as the world rights of three Russ films—*Peter the Great, Polikushka* and *jola*—were offered for sale on 30 September 1922. Of these, only *Polikushka* seemed to find takers, but its widespread success in Germany and elsewhere opened the way for future Soviet fiction films. It was distributed to great acclaim in Germany by Ufa.[31]

In an interview during this visit, Aleinikov pointed out some of the main problems the Soviets faced in buying any type of foreign film:

> If foreign film entrepreneurs meet our efforts halfway, if they understand that the Russian market cannot defray the licensing cost because of an unfavorable exchange rate, they would make possible a more or less complete restoration of the Russian film market, which would then compensate them for their current cooperation. A few firms have understood this and have appreciated the significance of being the first to

> work with Russia. These have made a number of offers which are in my possession.[32]

The issue of license fees was a crucial one. Ordinarily, film producers selling their wares abroad depended for their profit less on the price of the prints themselves than on a fee for the license to distribute the film in a given territory. Indeed, in Germany in 1922–3 the price of raw stock moved upward faster even than the mark depreciated during hyperinflation, and sellers often made little or nothing on prints. Russia, in spite of its large number of screens and huge territory, had relatively few commercial cinemas that showed seven days a week and paid full rental fees; the smaller sums earned from workers' club and ambulatory rural projectors kept Soviet distributors' income down. This was an unfamiliar concept to German capitalists, however, and Soviet buyers visiting Berlin had to convince them that small license fees were warranted for a market of such apparently great size. Aleinikov's statement suggests that he succeeded in some cases.

German exports in general at this time were handled by the same specialized import-export firms mentioned above in relation to American exportation. Only the very biggest firms, like Ufa, had their own sales offices or representatives abroad, and then only in nearby countries like Denmark, Austria and other central European countries. The rights for various territories would be sold as a group to the import-export firms, which would in turn offer them for sale piecemeal. So, for example, Deruss-Film advertised in September of 1922 that it now owned the Polish, Russian, Czech and other rights for *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* and wished to sell its licenses for the respective countries.[33]

In general, it would appear that a number of relatively small German capitalist firms found the idea of trading with Russia attractive. For a large firm, the rewards were not great enough and there was too much risk involved. The risks in dealing with Russia as perceived by the Germans at this time included the depressed value of the ruble, the possibility of foreign debts being cancelled once more if Lenin lost power, and the competition from smugglers and dupers. For a smaller firm, however, the rewards might seem great enough to justify the risk. At any rate, a number of these firms handled the increasing flow of films and equipment into Russia, and I would hypothesize, though the evidence is sketchy, that their willingness to take risks in the hopes of long-

term profits probably played a significant rôle in the gradual build-up of the Soviet film industry in the first half of the NEP period.

In September of 1922, as Deruss was trying to sell *Caligari* to Russia, the IAH opened the offices of the Industrie-und Handels-AG, a firm it set up under its general holding company, the Aufbau, to buy and sell film goods for Russia. Even this organ of the German Communist Party, however, did not work entirely apart from the influence of commercial German firms. The Industrie-und Handels-AG contracted out its purchasing and sales functions to a private firm which acted for years as its general representative: the Deutsch-Amerikanische Film-Union AG (or Dafu). Dafu was a relatively small stock company which had been founded on 4 December 1921 and had done little to attract attention to itself up to that point. The IAH contract apparently helped it; in January 1923 the company was reorganized, and *Lichtbildbühne* remarked: "Through an agreement with the Industrie-und Handels-AG, Internationale Arbeitershilfe für Sowjetrussland, the company's sphere of operations was enlarged."[34]

It is not wholly clear why the IAH chose Dafu as its film representative, but there are some indicative points. An IAH press release describing the contract with Dafu merely said that the firm was willing to work with Russia without receiving monopoly control over the distribution in a certain territory, and that it wanted to help develop the "productivity and prosperity" of the Russian film industry.[35] Possibly this means that Dafu was willing to sell on credit. Furthermore, Dafu was connected with a number of smaller firms—for example, Kultur-Film AG and Humboldt GmbH—that specialized primarily in documentaries. A link-up with the Soviet Union would clearly be mutually advantageous. The IAH's first purchase of finished films for Russia was announced as consisting of a package of nine Terra features from the 1921–2 and 1922–3 seasons, and nine educational films from Deulig, Lassally and Humboldt (the Dafu subsidiary); these went to the Petrograd Photo-Cinema Committee. In July of 1923 the head of Dafu travelled to Moscow to show a group of educational and cultural documentaries to Lunacharsky and other officials, with the view of selling the films for use in such places as workers' universities. At least some of these films were sold. Moreover, some feature-length documentaries which Dafu distributed in Germany—most notably *Nanook of the North* in 1924—were also sold through the

Industrie-und Handels-AG to Russia.[36] The Dafu contract seems to have been a satisfactory one for both sides and lasted at least until 1925.[37]

During late 1922, the Industrie-und Handels-AG did not represent all Soviet film firms; it had an exclusive contract with the Photo-Cinema Committees of both Moscow and Petrograd, and with the Russ cooperative. Later it carried through a similar relationship with Goskino, and in April of 1923 took Russ under its wing as a subsidiary.[38] In 1924, as mentioned earlier, this latter arrangement was changed to a jointly owned stock company, Mezhrabpom-Russ.

The private film companies that grew up under NEP were free to deal with other German import-export firms to secure the foreign films they needed. One major transaction took place in mid-October when Kino-Moskva—which was founded in early 1922—established a representative, Arved Schneebach, in Berlin. He operated out of the offices of another small German import-export firm, the Anglo-American Film-Export Company. At the same time that Schneebach was installed, Anglo-American announced the sale of a large package of sixty-two films to Soviet Russia. These included *Sumurun, Carmen* (both Lubitsch), *Vanina* (von Gerlach), *Der Golem* (Boese and Wegener), *Schloss Vogelod* (Murnau), *Der goldene See, Der müde Tod* and both parts of *Dr Mabuse* (Lang). Thus the way was prepared for Sergei Eisenstein's first editing lesson, since reportedly his earliest practical filmmaking experience was in helping revising *Dr Mabuse* for Soviet release. Later Anglo-American sold more films for exportation to Russia, including the mammoth serial *Die Herrin der Welt*. Anglo-American also apparently dealt with Sevzapkino as well, since that firm is mentioned in a December 1922 advertisement.[39]

After the formation of Goskino, a similar pattern persisted. In March 1923, L.A.Liberman, the head of Goskino, returned from a Berlin visit, having arranged to purchase raw stock and foreign films for Goskino, VUFKU (the Ukrainian state film company) and Goskinprom Gruzii (the Georgian state film company). Russian business was brisk in Berlin over that summer. In June an Anglo-American Film-Export Company advertisement called for "quick offers of good fiction films from the current and previous years' production for Russia". Two German production companies, Rex and Aaga, announced that they had sold the Russian rights of

some of their films to the Treumann-Larsen-Film Vertriebs-GmbH, yet another small distribution firm which seems to have dealt regularly with Russia; as of April 1924, Treumann claimed to have sold seventy-five films to Russia. During 1926 and 1927 it distributed a few Goskino and Sovkino films in Germany.[40]

Later, in September 1923, the assistant head of Goskino, Kosman, visited Berlin. A statement made in an interview shortly after his arrival suggests that Goskino was interested in adjusting its organization to facilitate dealing with capitalist firms abroad:

> I came to Berlin in order to learn about the new state of German film conditions, and in particular to compare German sales and distribution of both fictional and educational films with the organizational forms that exist in Russia.

According to Marchand and Weinstein, Kosman also bought extensive supplies in Berlin: thirty-three fiction films, fifty scientific films, 20,000 meters of negative raw stock, 700,000 meters of positive, a complete electrical outfit for the First State Cinema Factory, 30,000 rubles' worth of photographic equipment, and various chemicals. These goods began arriving in Moscow in February 1924, and Marchand and Weinstein credit this buying trip with having been "the starting point for Goskino's current activities".[41] Certainly the timing suggests that the upward trend in Goskino's production in 1924—most notably with *The Extraordinary Adven tures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* and *Kino-Eye*—was facilitated in part by these purchases.

Thus, if we take 1924 as the year when the Soviet cinema's recovery finally took hold, it becomes apparent that German-Soviet dealings played an extensive rôle in it. The extent of those dealings can perhaps be better judged if we note that by 1926 the Soviet Union was, in terms of income, Germany's third-largest export market for finished films, after Austria and Czechoslovakia, and second-largest for raw stock, after the United States. A Soviet observer visiting the Agfa plant in Berlin in 1925 learned that recently nearly 15 percent of that firm's total production of raw stock had been sold to the Soviet Union.[42]

Given the extent of this foreign commerce and its importance to the Soviet industry, it is useful to look at how it was financed. The

Soviet government was unable or discinlined to provide extensive direct subsidies for purchases abroad. Apparently much of what the Soviets bought was acquired on credit, and not just Soviet government credit. The Commissariat of Foreign Trade allocated 2. 3 million rubles of credits to Goskino in 1923, 1,700,000 to film and 600,000 for equipment.[43] Presumably some of Kosman's Berlin purchases were financed with this money. Marchand and Weinstein's description of Kosman's acquisitions supports this hypothesis:

> All these operations were accomplished on credit and guaranteed by letters of exchange signed by Goskino officials, at terms which made is possible to sell them on the market before having to make payment. These add up to a total of one million gold rubles. Finally, Kosman obtained from German banks a credit of 500,000 gold rubles for Goskino with the guarantee of the Russian State Bank.

Lebedev confirms that "it was possible to obtain credit in Germany as early as 1922", and says that Russia's growth during the 1922–3 period was bolstered by the distribution of foreign films obtained on credit.[44]

Similarly, part of the aid which the IAH supplied to the Soviet film industry was in the form of credit. A 1922 statement issued by the newly formed Industrie-und Handels-AG described its attempts to regularize film relations between Russia and Western Europe:

> The first steps toward these goals were made by the Industrieund Handels-AG in Russia itself: it carried through negotiations with the central authorities there successfully; it then closed extensive contracts with the important film companies—the state-run as well as the private—and furnished them with credits, and in this way allied these companies in a sort of pooling agreement *[Interessengemeinschaft]*.[45]

When the IAH financed Mezhrabpom-Russ in 1924, it depended partly on credit:

> The restoration and maintenance of the studio, and the production of just those films planned for 1925 requires a

> total sum of a million rubles, or about two million gold marks. While a part of the money could be raised through the enterprises of the IAH in Russia, the rest was supplied in the form of credit.[46]

These credits were supplied in exchange for the export rights to Mezhrabpom-Russ films. Since the Russian films could usually be amortized within their domestic market, all foreign sales would be profit, which would then pay the IAH back for its initial loans. The venture seems to have worked: up to 1931, 34 percent of the films produced by Mezhrabpom-Russ were exported and 918,326.74 rubles of the firm's total gross of 20,306,468.65 rubles came from sales outside the Soviet Union. By 1931, Mezhrabpom-Film was 100 percent owned by the IAH, which raised its capital to two million rubles entirely from the company's profits.[47] It had started at 52,000 and risen in stages in the intervening years.

Selling films abroad on credit was a standard way of dealing for capitalist film firms around the world. The German companies were not making any particular concessions to the Soviets in that sense. The main initial problem was overcoming the sense in Germany that extending credit to Russian firms would be unusually risky. But, as mentioned earlier, a number of small firms did take that risk, and the benefits for the German and Soviet industries were mutual—though assuredly the issue was far more crucial for the Soviet side.

The revival in production that occurred in 1923 and early 1924 seems to have proved a crucial factor in the way the Soviet film industry was organized for the remainder of the decade. Kosman's buying trip to Berlin in September 1923 coincided with the formation of the Mantsev Committee, whose investigations led to the establishment of Sovkino. During the summer of 1924 another committee, headed by the Commissar for Foreign Trade, Leonid Krasin, was planning the structure of the future Sovkino. At the end of that year, Krasin revealed that the committee's initial idea was to combine all Soviet film companies into Sovkino. That, however, did not happen:

> The former project has been changed, in that the business film enterprises, like Goskino, Sevzapkino, Kinosever, Proletkino, Kino-Moskva, etc., whose work had been proven to be more or less productive and commercial, were able to

> maintain their autonomy…. Particularly in the recent period, it can be said that the work of the existing Russian film organisations has developed strongly, which also altered the original plan for Sovkino.

Krasin mentioned *Red Imps, Palace and Fortress, The Comedians* (1923, Sevzapkino), *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* and *Aelita* as examples of strong recent productions.[48]

It is, of course, impossible to say what effect this 1924 decision not to make Sovkino a production monopoly had on the Development of Soviet filmmaking. It seems likely, however, that the comparative lack of centralized control over the production stage may have fostered the rise of the montage movement, which was occurring at this same period. The decline of that movement likewise parallels the move toward increased centralization from 1930 on.

CONCLUSIONS

This examination of the relative dearth of official Soviet subsidies for the film industry, and of the extensive dependence on foreign trade and credit, suggests that the Soviet film industry must be looked at in an international context. Although some progress toward recovery was made domestically in the year after the NEP was announced, the distribution wing of the industry, and firms remained largely dependent on old or smuggled prints. More momentum was added to the recovery after the Treaty of Rapallo and the establishment of friendly relations with German firms, both directly and through the IAH.

The Soviets' connections abroad affected more than simply the early growth of the film industry. Exportation of Russian films produced from 1924 on has had a lingering impact on how the silent era has been viewed ever since. We are all aware that the titles by which we know the Soviet classics today are usually those bestowed upon them by their German distributors. Moreover, even our notions of what the Soviet cinema was like aesthetically and what its major films were continues to rest almost entirely on a familiarity only with those which were exported at the time. Major films even of the montage style, like *My Grandmother* (Kote Mikaberidze, 1929) and *The State Functionary* (Ivan Pyriev,

1930), remain virtually unknown to any but specialists in the West, because they were not exported. Similarly, the film industry continued to be affected by its foreign dealings after 1924. For example, many of the attacks leveled at Sovkino in the late 1920s related to its import-export policies. It is hoped that further research into such questions as Sovkino's involvement with German big capital in the formation of the ill-fated Derussa in 1927 will shed light on the film industry's attempts to find support abroad after its initial recovery.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 2
Ideology and Popular Culture in Soviet Cinema: The Kiss of Mary Pickford

RICHARD TAYLOR

> Yesterday I was in the Kingdom of the Shadows.
>
> If only you knew how strange it is to be there. There, everything—the earth, the trees, the people, the water, the air—is tinted in the single tone of gray: in a gray sky there are gray rays of sunlight; in gray faces gray eyes, and the leaves of the trees are gray like ashes. This is not life, but the shadow of life and this is not movement but the soundless shadow of movement.
>
> I must explain, lest I be suspected of symbolism or madness. I was at Aumont's café and saw the Lumières' *cinématographe*— moving photographs. The impression it produced was so unusual, so original and complex, that I can hardly convey it in all its nuances, but I can attempt to convey its essence….
>
> A railway train appears on the screen. It darts like an arrow straight towards you—look out! It seems as if it is about to run you into a mangled sack of skin, full of crumpled flesh and shattered bones, and destroy this hall and this building, stuffed so full of wine, women, music and vice, and reduce it to fragments and to dust.[1]

These were the words of Maxim Gorky in his syndicated newspaper column to describe his first experience of cinema. He had seen his first film at the Nizhny Novgorod Fair in the summer of 1896, at Charles Aumont's *café chantant,* where it was the principal attraction and advertised as "the miracle of the 19th century".[2] The first public exhibition of the *cinématographe* in the Russian Empire had taken place shortly before on 5 May 1896, at the Aquarium music-hall in St Petersburg. The same film had

been shown there earlier as a diversion before the third act of the popular operetta *Alfred Pacha à Paris,* which starred Mme Millie Meyer. The novelty value of the film proved phenomenal as reported in *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti:*

> You see a train arriving, then a funny clown fight, then people playing cards, then bathing by the sea-shore, and the audience thinks that these people are all living rather than photographs on a vast screen.[3]

Cinema began its life in Russia, as elsewhere, as a fairground attraction and a music-hall turn. In its early stages it was not regarded as anything as useful as a serious medium of communication—political or otherwise—or as anything as high-flown as a form of artistic expression. As late as 1913, Tsar Nicholas II remarked that "cinema is an empty, totally useless, and even harmful form of entertainment".[4] Cinema was quite simply a novelty and, moreover, a novel way of making money. Even those first entrepreneurs of cinema, the Lumière brothers, saw it as a passing means of making a quick profit.[5]

The early days of cinema compounded the association of the "moving photograph" with the popular culture that derived from the fairground and the music-hall. Early films were no more than fifty feet in length, and they could therefore do no more than satisfy the kind of appetite that had previously been satisfied by the fairground attraction or the music-hall sketch. The film viewed by Gorky and mentioned by *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* was the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée du train en gare,* and it had a very simple and straightforward plot: a train enters a station, disgorges one load of passengers, takes on others and then steams out of the station towards the audience with the kind of impact that Gorky described. Another popular early film was *L'Arroseur arrosé:* a gardener sprays his flowers with a hose. A cheeky young lad puts his foot on the hose, stopping the flow of water. Puzzled, the gardener peers down the hose to see what has happened. The lad lifts his foot, releasing the flow of water, and the gardener is soaked.

While cinema remained a novelty, these sorts of short film were enough to attract and retain a real audience. That cinema remained a novelty for some time was at least in part due to the early structure of the industry. For some years in the towns and

cities, and for a considerably long time-period in rural areas, films were shown by traveling exhibitors. Because of the patents that the Lumière brothers had taken out to protect their quick profits, each exhibitor had to purchase both his equipment and his films directly from them in Paris, although a Moscow office was opened later. Each exhibitor then took his films from town to town, village to village, settlement to settlement until either his films had worn out or his potential audience had been exhausted. Within the confines of the Lumière monopoly a free-for-all existed with each exhibitor vying for films and for audiences. Everyone concerned had the same ambition as the Lumières: to make a quick profit.

As the audience for the cinema expanded, the novelty began to wear off or, rather, cinema's attraction as a novelty began to shift geographical location. Films had therefore to become more attractive, and in the process they also gradually became longer. Within ten years of the first film demonstrations, the one-reeler was giving way to the two-reeler and, by the outbreak of the First World War, three-and four-reel films were becoming more common. Novelty—at least, for the more sophisticated, more blase urban audiences—began to give way to melodrama and sensation. Melodrama had been one of the principal forms of popular entertainment in the cities, and cinema was appealing to the same mass audience.

But at the same time cinema also needed to attract entirely new audiences if it was to continue to expand and to bring in a quick profit; and, for rather similar reasons, each exhibitor was also concerned to attract his rivals' audiences. When cinemas appeared to threaten the continued existence of theater, therefore, it represented a threat primarily to popular theatrical forms such as melodrama rather than to what we regard as "legitimate" theater. Although cinema was able to penetrate to some extent into rural areas and continued to have novelty value there, it remained, until well into the Soviet period, a predominantly urban form of entertainment and, albeit only intermittently, of edification. The concentration of urban audiences made the establishment of permanent cinema theaters a financially viable—indeed, attractive—proposition. This phenomenon also occurred in other countries: for example, in the United States, where the new theaters were popularly known as "nickelodeons". We have only to consider the names that were given to these cinema theaters, in Russia and elsewhere, to understand the nature of cinema's mass appeal at that

time: in Russia we find names such as Mirazh (Mirage), Fantaziia (Fantasy), Chary (Marvels), Mir chudes (The World of Wonders) and Illiuzion (Illusion). In the Russian Empire, as elsewhere, cinema was the "dream palace", a world where illusion of a better reality could be created and sustained. The existence of such cinema theaters increased the demand for more, and longer, films; it also reinforced cinema's threat to popular theater. Cinema was able to provide better entertainment and more varied and exciting forms of escapism.

It was at this point, in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, that Russian cinema emerged as more than just a colony of imperial France. Pathé, who had bought out the Lumière patent, opened a Moscow office in 1904, and Gaumont followed suit in 1905.[6] These Moscow offices made film more accessible to those who wished to make money from it, and a period of rapid self-generating expansion followed in the Russian industry. Traveling exhibitors continued to push the frontiers of cinema into the countryside, but in the urban centers the development of a network of cinema theaters in the towns and cities necessitated the creation of a more complex system of distribution through exchange and rental. The profits derived from this Russian film distribution were soon considerable enough to finance the production of the first Russian films.

The first Russian film studio was set up in 1907 by the businessman Alexander Drankov,[7] and in 1908 he produced the first all-Russian feature film, *Stenka Razing,*[8] in response to Pathé's *Donskiekazaki (Don Cossacks),*[9] which was the most popular film in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Despite the growth of a domestic film industry the Russian market remained dominated by imports, especially from France, until after the outbreak of the First World War: as late as 1910–11, Pathé still controlled 75 percent of the market.[10] This foreign dominance encouraged Drankov toward sensationalism: he filmed Tolstoy with the connivance of the latter's wife and made films with titles designed to attract a mass audience, such as Fire in *St Petersburg* and *People Who Were Human Once*.[11] It is, perhaps, small wonder that many people viewed cinema, in Kornei Chukovsky's words, as "that creative creation of those very Kaffirs and Hottentots who live 'below'".[12] Not everyone agreed with Chukovsky, however, and certainly not audiences: by the outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914 the audiences for cinema outstripped those

for all other forms of public entertainment—including "legitimate" theater, music-hall and variety theater considered together.

It was not just the "Kaffirs and Hottentots who live 'below'" who demurred at Chukovsky's assessment. The popular writer Leonid Andreev was among the first to appreciate cinema's potential:

> The miraculous Cinema!... Having no language, being equally intelligible to the savages of St Petersburg and the savages of Calcutta, it truly becomes the genius of international contact, brings the ends of the earth and the spheres of the soul nearer and gathers the whole of quivering humanity into a single stream.[13]

Andreev's concern was one that was to haunt Soviet film theorists throughout the 1920s and beyond: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. The task of the present is to distinguish cinema from theater, to determine precisely the basic creative elements of each and thus to set each on its own true path."[14] The distinction between cinema and theater was to provide a complex issue: and, in particular, the distinction between popular cinema and popular theater often was also a contentious one.

The polemics that preoccupied Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s cannot be fully and properly understood except in the context of the general debate about the legitimacy of cinema as an art form and, in particular, about its autonomy and specific distinction from theater and theatrical forms. It is difficult and, indeed, inadvisable to divide the differing arguments and the varying positions too schematically, but one thing that can be stated quite categorically and unambiguously is that the polemics of the 1920s did not emerge suddenly from nowhere after October 1917; their roots were quite clearly in the pre-Revolutionary period. The Futurists regarded cinema as the legitimate heir to theater. In 1913, Vladimir Mayakovsky argued that "Theater has brought itself to ruin and must bequeath its inheritance to cinema".[15] But the Futurists' view of cinema was quite specific: as a low art form, as an instrument of popular culture, it was eminently suited for use in the battle to destroy high art and high culture. In this respect, cinema was a weapon like the circus or the music-hall or the political poster. The practice did not, however, match the theory.

When Mayakovsky did make films, it was some five years after the Revolution, for a private company: and the films, although parodying the high-flown style of the contemporary melodrama, were not exactly revolutionary in either form or content.

Similarly, Vsevolod Meyerhold's excursions into cinema—the film versions of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1915) and Przybyszewski's *The Strong Man* (1916)—merely furnished an opportunity for the director to apply to cinema ideas that he was already trying out in the theater. As he remarked, "It is still too early to say whether cinema will become an art form in its own right or simply an accessory to the theater."[16] There are certain similarities between Meyerhold's practice and the ideas of Lev Kuleshov, the first real theorist of cinema in Russia. At least initially, both saw the director as having almost dictatorial control over the film; both believed that cinema's specific quality lay at least in part in its unique capacity for lighting effects; and both saw the actor largely as an instrument of the director's will. There are, of course, fine distinctions to be made between Meyerholdian "biomechanics" and Kuleshov's notion of the actor as *naturshchik,* or model, and between the "exercises" promoted by both. At this stage Kuleshov—of whom Pudovkin and others later wrote, "We make films, but Kuleshov made cinema"[17]—defined cinema's uniqueness through its mode of composition both within the individual shot and, through montage, between each individual shot:

> The essence of cinema art lies in the creativity of the director and the artist: everything is based on composition. To make a picture the director must compose the separate filmed fragments, disordered and disjointed, into a single whole and juxtapose these separate moments into a more advantageous, integral and rhythmical sequence, just as a child constructs a whole word or phrase from separate scattered blocks of letters…. The cinema artist paints with *objects,* boards (walls) and *light* (collaboration with the cameraman). His canvas is the film camera's degree angle of perception, like a triangle on a plane. On the screen what is important is not *what* is in the frame, but how the objects are distributed, how they are composed on the plane.[18]

Like others at that time, Kuleshov looked to America for inspiration. America represented everything that was new and dynamic. In an article probably written in the spring of 1920, Kuleshov analyzed the success of American films and made a strong case for *amerikanshchina* ("Americanism" or "Americanitis"):

> If in 1914–16 we had gone into cinemas and begun to examine assiduously all the films released by both Russian and foreign studios, and if we paid attention to which films made the greatest impression on the audience, which films forced the audience to react to cinema action, we should have come to some curious hypothesis. However, it must be noted that we would have had to regard the audience in the cheap seats as the most immediately receptive and as unspoiled by the philistine prejudices and conventions of the audience in the expensive seats. In practice our experiment would have yielded the following results:
>
> 1 Foreign releases give more pleasure than Russian ones.
> 2 The most popular foreign films are all American-made detective pictures.
>
> The audience is especially receptive to American films. A successful move by the hero, a desperate chase, a daring fight causes whistles of delight, howls and whoops, and intensely interested figures jump up from their seats so that they can see the interesting action better.[19]

American films clearly had the same effect on audiences as a successful music-hall turn, a variety or circus act: they entertained and diverted through a rapid array of experiences. The conventional view was that *amerikanshchina* was to be deplored.

> Superficial people and reflective officials have been terribly afraid of things American and of detective stories in cinema and have attributed the success of these kinds of pictures to the unusual depravity and the bad taste of the younger generation and the proletarian audience….

The fact is that in detective literature and, to an even greater extent, in the American detective script the basic element of the plot is the intensity in the build-up of the action and the entertainment value of the plot. For cinema there is no more damaging manifestation of literariness than psychologizing, i.e. external inertia in the plot. The success of American films lies in their maximum degree of cinema specificity, in the maximum amount of movement and in their heroic romanticism. My second and most important hypothesis is that the Americans, thanks to the living conditions in their country and to their particular commercial methods, try to show how to get as much plot as possible into a minute of footage and how to achieve the maximum number of scenes and the maximum effect with the minimum wastage of film.[20]

This maximum economy in each individual shot inevitably meant that greater significance was attached to the composition of the whole through the method by which each individual shot was to be linked to its successor shot:

> It follows from everything that I have said above that *genuine cinema is the montage of American shots and that the essence of cinema—its method of achieving an artistic effect—is montage.*[21]

What Kuleshov and his pupils in their Workshop meant by *amerikanshchina* can be clearly seen in practice in the film *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924), which brilliantly employs the techniques of American cinema to parody ruthlessly American preconceptions about Bolshevism and the Soviet Union.

If Kuleshov was in some sense the "father" of Soviet film theory, Sergei Eisenstein was undoubtedly the "master". He took Kuleshov's notion of montage further and developed his own theory of the "montage of attractions":

> *An attraction (in our diagnosis of theater) is any aggressive moment in theater, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only*

> *opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion. (The path to knowledge encapsula ted in the phrase "through the living play of the passions" is, specific to theater.)*
>
> Emotional and psychological, of course, in the sense of direct reality as employed, for instance, in the *Grand Guignol,* where eyes are gouged out or arms and legs amputated on stage; or: the direct reality of an actor involved through the telephone with a nightmarish event taking place dozens of miles away; or: the situation of a drunkard who, sensing his approaching end, pleads for protection and whose pleas are taken as a sign of madness. In this sense and not in the sense of the unravelling of psychological problems where the attraction is the theme itself as such, existing and acting *outside* the particular action, but topical enough.[22]

Eisenstein was here explaining the techniques that he and his colleagues in Proletkult were deploying in their stage production of Ostrovsky's *Enough Simplicity for Every Wise Man,* but it was theater's inability to contain these techniques that led Eisenstein to experiment with film and incorporate into this production his first cinematic work, the short *Glumov's Diary.* Several further attempts to realize the "montage of attractions" on stage led to further frustration and eventually, as Eisenstein himself put it, the "horse bolted and the cart fell into the cinema".[23] Unlike the Futurists, Eisenstein did not, however, regard the cinema as a "low" art form with which to destroy "high" art like theater. He was prepared to draw on both "high" and "low" forms ("a roll on the drums just as much as Romeo's soliloquy"). Indeed, he quite specifically distinguished between an "attraction" and a "stunt":

> The attraction has nothing in common with the stunt. The stunt or, more accurately, the trick (it is high time that this much abused term was returned to its rightful place) is a finished achievement of a particular kind of mastery (acrobatics, for the most part) and it is only one kind of attraction that is suitable for presentation (or, as they say in the circus, "for sale"). In so far as the trick is absolute and complete *within itself,* it means the direct opposite of the attraction, which is based exclusively on something relative, the reactions of the audience.[24]

An attraction would provoke an audience reaction in the same way that the melodrama of the *Grand Guignol,* the circus act or the music-hall or variety turn did: it provoked, it shocked, it *collided* with the audience's reaction. The thesis was the attraction, the antithesis the audience reaction; the synthesis that emerged provided the thesis for the next antithesis, and so on. We can find numerous examples of such attractions in Eisenstein's work from the slaughterhouse sequence in *The Strike* (1925) to the cross-cutting between the strutting Kerensky and the clockwork golden peacock in *October* (1927). The problem in practice was that audiences did not share Eisenstein's cultural breadth and depth and could not comprehend even many of his relatively straightforward references. Although the theory of the montage of attractions derived from popular culture, its practice demanded a greater familiarity on the part of audiences than the confines of that popular culture allowed: like so many other Soviet artistic experiments of the 1920 it went too far too fast.

Although Eisenstein was clearly familiar with the forms of popular culture, and indeed cited them frequently in his works both written and performed, he never advocated the mechanistic transposition of those forms from one art form or medium to another. He recognized that cinema specificity required an adaption or even transformation of the forms of theater, circus or *Grand Guignol,* just as he was later to perceive a need to adapt and develop the forms of the Japanese Kabuki theater or to learn from the laconic qualities of oriental calligraphy.

This recognition was not shared by all his contemporaries. The supporters of the Petrograd Factory of the Eccentric Actor (FEKS), led by Grigori Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg and Sergei Yutkevich, argued for an overthrow of the forms of "high" culture by those of "low" forms like circus, fairground and *Grand Guignol.* Indeed, their manifesto specifically proclaimed: "We prefer Charlie Chaplin's arse to Eleonore Duse's hands."[25] FEKS derived their name from the Russian word "ekstsentrik", which meant both "eccentric" and "clown". Herein lies the key to some of their central practices. For FEKS, cinema was essentially a "low" art in the traditions of "low" art forms, and it represented the art form of the machine age and therefore of progress and modernization.

> Yesterday—the culture of Europe.
> Today—the technology of America.

> Industry, production under the Stars and Stripes. Either Americanization or the undertaker….
>
> *The rhythm of the machine,* concentrated by *America,* realized on the *street*.[26]

Unlike conventional theater or literature, as they saw them, cinema had no pretensions but stood for:

ART WITHOUT A CAPITAL LETTER, A PEDESTAL OR A FIG-LEAF

> Life requires art that is *hyperbolically crude, dumbfounding, nervewracking, openly utilitarian, mechanically exact, momentary, rapid,* otherwise no one will hear, see or stop.[27]

It was, they maintained, "Better to be a young pup than and old bird of paradise",[28] and they claimed as their antecedents precisely those "low" art forms that have already been mentioned several times:

> In literature—the *chansonnière,* the cry of the auctioneer, street language.
>
> In painting—the circus poster, the jacket of the cheap novel.
>
> In music—the jazz band (the commotion of a negro orchestra), circus marches.
>
> In ballet—American song and dance routines.
>
> In theater-the music-hall, cinema, circus, *café chantant,* boxing.[29]

Writing elsewhere, Leonid Trauberg summoned "The Red Clown—to the rescue".[30] It is profoundly significant that here, in the FEKS manifesto, cinema is listed with music-hall, circus, *café chantant* and boxing. Elements of all these can be found in many FEKS films, from the character caricature of Coolidge Curzonovich Poincaré in *The Adventures of Oktiabrina* (1925) to the sinister Mystery Man in *The Devil's Wheel* (1926), and indeed right through several scenes in *The New Babylon* (1929) to the opening sequence in *The Youth of Maxim* (1934). The use of

attractions of this sort in FEKS films certainly provoked an Eisensteinian collision with audience reactions: the first performance of *The New Babylon* was attended by a riot, although whether this was due to the film or to the Shostakovich score that accompanied it has never been entirely clear.

What is clear, however, is that those filmmakers who most loudly proclaimed their allegiance to popular art forms actually made films whose particular art form, whatever its popular origin, was not popular with contemporary audiences. Put into practice, their ideas were too challenging, too difficult. Their work was revolutionary in content, but the difficulty for audiences used to conventional literary—or quasi-literary—narrative was that their work was also revolutionary in form. The greatest challenge, and the greatest difficulty, came of course from the work of Dziga Vertov and his Cine-Eye group, who, in their attempt to revolutionize the cultural experience of the new Soviet man, rejected all art, popular or otherwise, as artifice. While conceding certain attractions of *amerikanshchina,* the Cine-Eyes, in their 1922 "We. A version of a manifesto", also recognized its serious limitations:

> The Cine-Eye is grateful to the American adventure film for its ostentatious dynamism, to the dramatizations of American Pinkertonism for their rapid shot changes and close-ups. They are good but disorderly: not based upon a precise study of movement. A cut above the psychological drama but nonetheless insubstantial. A cliché. A copy of a copy.
>
> WE declare the old films, the romantic, the theatricalized etc., to be leprous.
>
> — Don't come near!
> — Don't look!
> — Mortally dangerous!
> — Contagious
>
> WE affirm the future of cinema art by rejecting its present.
>
> The death of "cinematography" is necessary so that the art of cinema may live. WE *call for the acceleration of its death*.[31]

The Cine-Eyes summoned cinema audiences to break with the past and with conventional art forms and move toward their own notion of Cine-Eye documentary cinema as the new art form of the new machine age of socialism:

> WE are purging the Cine-Eye of its hangers-on, of music, literature and theater, we are seeking our own rhythm, one that has not been stolen from elsewhere, and we are finding it in the movement of objects.
>
> WE invite you:
>
> —*away*—
>
> from the sweet embraces of the romance,
>
> from the poison of the psychological novel,
>
> from the clutches of the theater of adultery,
>
> with your backsides to music,
>
> —*away*—
>
> into the open, into four dimensional space (3+time), in search of our own material, meter and rhythm.[32]

There is a resonance here of the ideas put forward by Trotsky in his much ignored article "Vodka, the Church and the cinema", published in 1923.[33] In this Trotsky developed Marx's notion of religion as the opium of the people: whereas the Church had used its ritual to oppress the masses during the feudal period of human social development, the Tsarist regime, according to Trotsky, had used the state vodka monopoly to keep the masses in a condition of permanent alcoholic stupor. The socialist state must use its most powerful weapon, cinema, to open the eyes of the people to their previous exploitation and illuminate the path of their own socialist liberation:

> Meaningless ritual, which lies on the consciousness like an inert burden, cannot be destroyed by criticism alone; it can be supplanted by new forms of life, new amusements, new and more cultured theatres. Here again, thoughts go naturally to the most powerful—because it is the most democratic—instrument of the theatre, the cinema. Having no need of a clergy in brocade etc., the cinema unfolds on the white screen spectacular images of greater grip than are provided by the richest Church, grown wise in the experience of a thousand years, or by mosque or synagogue. In Church

> only one drama is performed and always one and the same, year in, year out, while in the cinema next door you will be shown the Easters of heathen, Jew and Christian, in their historic sequence, with their similarity of ritual. The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the Church door. The cinema is a great competitor, not only of the public-house, but of the Church. Here is an instrument which we must secure at all costs![34]

The similarity between Trotsky's analysis and Vertov's is, however, little more than a resonance. Vertov would have been appalled at the idea of cinema as drama or amusement: instead he emphasized the educational possibilities that cinema offered for the creation of a new and better reality. Rejecting existing films as "legitimized myopia", he argued in his 1923 manifesto "The Cine-Eyes. A revolution":

> The death sentence pronounced by the Cine-Eyes on all films without exception is still valid today.
>
> The most thorough investigation does not reveal a single film, a single piece of research that is correctly designed to *emancipate* the camera which has been pitifully enslaved and subjugated to the imperfect and none too clever human eye.[35]

But the Cine-Eye would enable audiences—indeed, compel them—to see reality in a new way, one that was more perfect, because of its mechanical base, than the human eye was capable of achieving:

> I am the Cine-Eye. I create a man more perfect than Adam was created. I create thousands of different people according to different preliminary sketches and schemes.
>
> I am the Cine-Eye.
>
> I take the strongest and most agile hands from one man, the fastest and best proportioned legs from another, the most handsome and expressive head from a third and through montage I create a new, perfect man.[36]

But, like his less radical and therefore less challenging fellow-filmmakers, Vertov had difficulty in attracting and retaining audiences for his films. The bulk of the Soviet cinema audience did

not want to be stretched or challenged. It did not want to be educated or morally uplifted or improved. It wanted to be amused and entertained, as did cinema audiences in other countries and at other times: it wanted novelty, laughter, escapism. In 1896, Gorky described the world as depicted on film as "the kingdom of the shadows", but only by the 1920s those for whom life itself had become dull and gray needed to escape from the reality that for them had likewise become a "kingdom of the shadows". They needed a new reality, certainly, but they needed a substitute for the circus, the fairground booth, the music-hall, the melodrama, and in the machine age that substitute was increasingly provided by fiction film dramas.

The most popular films in the Soviet Union, as elsewhere, in the mid-1920s were American imports. The film press, serious as well as popular, was studded with the names of Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Buster Keaton, Lillian Gish, Harold Lloyd, D.W.Griffith and so on. When Fairbanks and Pickford visited Europe in 1926 they also visited the Soviet Union where they were given a tumultuous reception. Their comments on *The Battleship Potemkin* were used to sell the film to the mass Soviet audience,[37] and they even starred in a Soviet film, *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*.

This light-hearted comedy, directed by Sergei Komarov in 1927, had as its alternative title *How Douglas Fairbanks Fell Out with Igor Dyinksy over Mary Pickford*. The plot was quite straightforward. An insignificant cashier at a cinema box office, played by the highly popular Soviet comedian Igor Ilyinsky, is in love. The starstruck object of his attentions promises to return them if he becomes famous. After a number of adventures Ilyinsky becomes an extra in a stunt sequence. He is left suspended in mid-air when Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford visit the studio: the film crew rush out to see them and Ilyinsky falls asleep. Pickford is touched by the scene, Ilyinsky is introduced to her as the "Soviet Harry Piel", and she plants a kiss on his cheek. The kiss of Mary Pickford makes him famous, and his girlfriend worships him. But after a few days the lipstick wears off and life returns to normal. The fragility of fame and fortune are all too apparent.[38]

No one recognized the importance of popular film dramas more clearly than Anatoly Lunacharsky who, as People's Commissar for Enlightenment, had overall responsibility for cinema and its development, both artistic and ideological. In addition to his

official position, Lunacharsky was the author of a number of scripts, including Panteleyev's *Cohabitation* (1918), Gardin's *The Locksmith and the Chancellor* (1923), Eggert's *The Bears' Wedding* (1925) and Roshal's *The Salamander* (1928). He is rumored to have been responsible for the idea for *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*. Unlike the works of the filmmakers mentioned above, Lunacharsky's scripts were deeply theatrical in terms of their narrative structure and plot development. Like the majority of the most popular Soviet films of the silent period, they borrowed heavily from the conventions of melodrama, and in effect silent cinema was a replacement for that other medium. Lunacharsky's scripts furnished the material for very popular films, audiences for Eggert's *The Bears' Wedding* outstripping the attendances for Eisenstein's much-heralded *The Battleship Potemkin*.[39] Partly because of his official responsibilities, Lunacharsky was acutely aware that, as he put it, "cinema is an industry and, what is more, a profitable industry",[40] and in a speech to filmmakers in January 1928 he argued:

> Many of our people do not understand that our film production must whet the public appetite; that, if the public is not interested in a picture that we produce, it will become boring agitation and we shall become boring agitators. But it is well known that boring agitation is counter-agitation. We must choose and find a line that ensures that *the film is both artistic and ideologically consistent and contains romantic experiences of an intimate and psychological character*.[41]

While Lunarcharsky would have been among the first to recognize that many films produced and seen in the Soviet Union during the 1920s were in some sense ideologically unsatisfactory or even harmful, he acknowledged the need to offer Soviet cinemagoers a varied diet. He was prepared to sanction popular films, even if they were not strictly speaking ideologically acceptable, in order to overcome cinema's financial difficulties. He justified this policy by recalling a conversation with Lenin:

> Vladimir Ilyich told me that *the production of new films Imbued with communist ideas and reflecting Soviet reality should begin with the newsreel and that, in his view, the time to produce films of this kind had perhaps not yet arrived.*

> "If you had a good newsreel, serious and educational pictures, then it doesn't matter if, to attract the public, you have some kind of useless picture of the more or less usual type. Of course censorship is necessary in any case. Counter-revolutionary and immoral films should have no place."
>
> To this Vladimir Ilyich added: "As you stand on your own two feet, thanks to good housekeeping, you might even receive a certain loan for this as the general situation in the country improves. You must develop production on a broader basis and, in particular, you must promote wholesome cinema among the masses in the cities and, to an even greater extent, in the countryside."
>
> Then, smiling, Vladimir Ilyich added: "Among our people you are reported to be a patron of art so you must remember that of all the arts for us the cinema is the most important."[42]

With Lenin's imprimatur, this policy of mixing the popular and the ideological continued until 1928, by which time it had become obvious that the mixture was not producing the desired results: Lenin's notion of "wholesome" cinema was being swamped by the commercially oriented films that Sovkino had to produce in order to keep afloat financially. The traditions of conventional popular culture were dictating both the form and the content of the major part of Soviet cinema's output. It was against this background that the first Party Conference on Cinema was held in March 1928.[43]

The purpose of the 1928 conference was to turn cinema into a more effective weapon for the Party during the cultural revolution that was to accompany the enormous changes of the First Five-Year Plan period (1928–32). The resolutions passed by the conference called for greater ideological vigilance, more efficient production methods and a greater identification between the films produced and the audiences for which they were intended. This last recommendation applied not only to the worker audience in the cities but also, and more important, to the emerging peasant audience in the countryside. This latter audience had of course not been exposed to cinema before and certainly not to the more innovative Soviet film experiments of the 1920s; nor, indeed, had it been consistently exposed to any of the other traditional forms of urban popular culture. It did, however, have its own cultural traditions which, because of the rapid process of Russian and

Soviet industrialization, were also familiar to a large section of the urban population. This was largely new ground for Soviet filmmakers and helps to explain the experimentation with rural themes and settings that characterized cinema in the early 1930s, especially in the Ukraine, and led to such films as Dovzhenko's *Earth* (1930), Vertov's *Enthusiasm* (also known as *The Donbass Symphony,* 1930), Savchenko's *The Accordion* (1934) and Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934). It also produced films dealing with the contemporary problems of transition such as Yutkevich's *The Golden Mountains* (1931), Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Alone* (1931) and Dovzhenko's *Ivan* (1932).

It would of course be absurd to suggest that experimentation was banished overnight from Soviet cinema:[44] the advent of sound, which had not been anticipated by the party conference and not allowed for in the five-year plan, shook Soviet cinema to its foundations. Those who had regarded sound film as yet another novelty or passing fad were confounded. Many of the leading directors were given special funds to investigate and master the new medium, and the results can be seen in experimental sequences in films as varied as *Enthusiasm* and *Alone,* Shub's *K.Sh.E.* (1932), Macheret's *Men and Jobs* (1932), Pudovkin's *The Deserter* (1933) and Kuleshov's *The Great Consoler* (1934). But there is no doubt that these films were the exception rather than the rule. The majority of Soviet sound films of the 1930s were conventionally theatrical in their narrative form and confirmed the fears expressed by Eisenstein, Alexandrov and Pudovkin in their celebrated 1928 declaration:

> Sound is a double-edged-sword invention and its most probable application will be along the line of least resistance, i.e. in the field of the *satisfaction of simple curiosity*.
>
> In the first place there will be commercial exploitation of the most saleable goods, i.e. of *talking pictures*—those in which the sound is recorded in a natural manner, synchronizing exactly with the movement on the screen and creating a certain "illusion" of people talking, objects making noise, etc.
>
> The first period of sensations will not harm the development of the new art; the danger comes with the second period, accompanied by the loss of innocence and purity of the initial concept of cinema's new textural

> possibilities, which confirms instead the epoch of its unimaginative use for "dramas of high culture" and other photographed representations of a theatrical order.[45]

The authors feared that the advent of sound would undermine the primacy of montage and thus destroy the specificity of cinema as an art form. It is here that the essential conflict between the aesthetic and the political lay in filmic terms.

The 1928 party conference led eventually to the creation of a single centralized cinema organization, Soiuzkino, in 1930. At its head was the party activist and administrator Boris Shumiatsky. Shumiatsky's role in the politics of Soviet cinema has been discussed more fully elsewhere.[46] He saw it as his job to turn Soviet cinema into what he called a "cinema for the millions"—indeed, he used that term as the title for one of his books.[47]

Shumiatsky envisioned a cinema that produced films for mass audiences and would provide them with entertainment instruction, political education,[48] but above all with films that were, in the catchphase of the critiques of the later 1920s, "intelligible to the millions". He was not concerned with aesthetic notions of cinema specifically, but rather with the effective communication of a political message to a mass audience. In direct contrast to the authors of the 1928 "Statement", Shumiatsky argued that "At the basis of every feature film lies a work of drama, a play for cinema, a script".[49] He attacked their emphasis on the importance of montage, arguing that "The overvaluation of montage represents the primacy of form over content, the isolation of aesthetics from politics".[50] He also savaged the notion that the narrative structure of a film could be anything but the conventional literary one:

> The plot of a work represents the constructive expression of its idea. A plotless form for a work of art is powerless to express an idea of any significance. That is why we require for our films a plot as the basic condition for the expression of ideas, of their direction, as the condition for their mass character, i.e. of the audience's interest in them. Certainly, among our masters you will find people who say: "I am working on the plot-less, storyless level."
>
> People who maintain that position are profoundly deluded.[51]

Shumiatsky elaborated on Lunacharsky's argument that "boring agitation is counter-agitation":

> A film and its success are directly linked to the degree of entertainment in the plot, in the appropriately constructed and realistic artistic motivations for its development.
>
> That is why we are obliged to require our masters to produce works that have strong plots and are organized around a storyline. Otherwise they [the works] cannot be entertaining, they can have no mass character, otherwise the Soviet screen will not need them.[52]

As Eisenstein remarked in 1938, after Shumiatsky's fall from grace, "There was a period in our cinema when montage was declared 'everything'. Now we are coming to the end of a period when montage is thought of as 'nothing'."[53]

The Western review of Soviet cinema in the 1930s tends to assume—partly for reasons of political convenience but partly also because of simple unfamiliarity with the films produced—that those films were all deeply earnest, heavy and dull. A cursory glance at some films, especially the anniversary films such as *Lenin in October* (1937), *The Man with the Gun* (1938) and *Lenin in 1918* (1939), might appear to confirm such a view. But these films are no more typical of the average product of Soviet cinema in the 1930s than are Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) or *Olympiade* (1938) or Fritz Hippler's *The Eternal few* (1940) typical of the films produced in Nazi Germany. If we look at these cinemas from the perspective of contemporary audiences, we see a quite different picture—or, rather, quite different pictures! Whereas a film like *Chapaev* (1934) was popular or at least in part because it was widely shown—in schools, factories and farms as well as in cinemas—other films were widely shown because they were popular. Foremost among these was the trilogy of musical comedies directed by Eisenstein's former assistant Grigori Alexandrov: *The Happy Guys* (1934), *The Circus* (1936) and *Volga-Volga* (1938). These films were as popular in their time and place as the musicals *Women Are Better Diplomats* (1941) or *The Great Love*(1942) were in the Third Reich or as, say, *The Sound of Music* was in a wider and later auditorium. They were popular films, but they did not draw so obviously on the conventions of the other media of popular culture as had the films

of the 1920s.[54] But in the 1920s cinema had only just come of age. For its language it had to draw on the conventions of other media as well as establish its own legitimacy through defining its own specificity. By the 1930s cinema had established its credentials and acquired a history and traditions of its own. Indeed, it had become for audiences in the Soviet Union and elsewhere the principal medium of popular culture. It had created its own conventions, and those conventions were based not so much on the experimental avant-garde films of, for example, Eisenstein, Vertov or FEKS, but on the relatively conservative mainstream popular cinema of directors like Gardin, Eggert, Otsep or the master, Protazanov. Within this more conventional framework there were of course directors who experimented, such as Barnet or Ermler.

Our view that "In the twenties, the Soviet cinema drew its very breath of life from a close connection with the Soviet state. In the thirties, this integration poisoned it"[55] is an extreme over-simplification. It is much more accurate to argue that it was in the 1930s, and specifically during the reign of Boris Shumiatsky, that Soviet cinema established the mix of ideology and popular culture that has survived broadly to the present day, although both the medium and the message have obviously changed in detail. *The Battleship Potemkin* was to *The Kiss of Mary Pick ford* in the 1920s what *Enthusiasm* was to *The Happy Guys* in the 1930s and what *Stalker* has been to *Train Station for Two* in the 1980s. From the Soviet point of view, after all, as Shumiatsky argued:

> Neither the Revolution nor the defense of the Socialist fatherland is a tragedy for the proletariat. We have always gone and in future we shall still go into battle singing and laughing.[56]

Cinema had become the principal means by which ideology was transmitted through the medium of popular culture: the kiss of Mary Pickford had left its lipstick mark.

NOTES

1 Pactus [pseudonym of Maksim Gorkii], "Beglye zametki", *Nizhegorodskii listok*, 4 July 1896.

2 N.M.Zorkaia, *Na rubezhe stoletii. U istokov massovogo iskusstva v Rossii 1900–1910 godov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), p. 24.

3 ibid., p. 22.
4 I.S.Zil'bershtein, "Nikolai II o kino", *Sovetskii ekran,* 12 April 1927, p. 10.
5 M.Bessey and G.LoDuca, *Georges Méliès, mage* (Paris: J.J.Pauvert, 1961), pp. 45–6.
6 B.S.Likhachev, *Kino v Rossii, 1896–1926* (Leningrad: Akademiia, 1927), p. 29.
7 ibid., p. 40; and S.S.Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), p. 46.
8 A.A.Khanzhonkov, *Pervye gody russkoi kinematografii: Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Kinofotoizdat, 1937), p. 22.
9 Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia,* p. 47,
10 ibid., p. 51.
11 ibid., p. 47.
12 K.Chukovskii, *Nat Pinkerton isovremennaia literatura,* cited in Neia Zorkaia, Na rubezhe stoleti (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), p. 26.
13 L.V.Andreev, "Pis'mo o teatre", in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St Petersburg: A.F.Marks, 1913), Vol. 8, pp. 305–16.
14 L.V.Andreev, "Pis'mo o teatre", *Shipovnik,* vol. 22, no. 3 (1914), pp. 245–7.
15 V.V.Mayakovskii, "Otnoshenie segodniashnego teatra i kinematografa k iskusstvu", *Kine-Zhurnal,* 8 September 1913.
16 "V.E.Meyerkhol'd o kinematografe", *Teatral'naia gazeta,* 31 May 1915, p. 7.
17 Vsevolod Pudovkin, introduction to L.V.Kuleshov, *Iskusstvo kino* (Moscow: Tea-Kino-pechat, 1929), pp. 3–4.
18 L.V.Kuleshov, "O zadachakh khudozhnika v kinematografe", *Vestnik kinematografii,* no. 126 (1917), pp. 15–16.
19 Kuleshov's article was one of a series of six, apparently written in the spring of 1920, under the general title of *Znamia kinematografii (The Banner of Cinema).* The article was originally written as "Teoriia montazha i amerikanizm" ("The theory of montage and Americanism"), but was published in revised form as "Amerikanshchina" ("Americanism") in *Kino-Fot,* no. 3 (1922), pp. 11–12. The English translation in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (eds), *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents* (London/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 72–3, is from the published version in *Kino-Fot.*
20 Kuleshov, "Teoriia", pp. 11–12.
21 ibid.
22 S.M.Eisenshtein, "Montazh attraktsionov" ("The montage of attractions"), *Lef,* no. 3 (June—July 1923), pp. 70–1 and 74–5.
23 S.M.Eisenshtein, "Sredniaia iz trekh", *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 11–12 (November–December 1934), p. 81, trans. in Richard Taylor (ed.

and trans.), *Eisenstein:Selected Writings, 1922–34,* Vol. 1 (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987). This article has also been translated as "Through theatre to cinema", in Jay Leyda (ed. and trans.), *Sergei Eisenstein: Film Form (*New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949), p. 16.

24 Eisenshtein, "Montazh attraktsionov", pp. 70–1 and 74–5.

25 *Ekstsentrizm. Sbornik statei* (Petrograd: 1922), p. 4, trans. in Taylor and Christie, *Film Factory,* pp. 58–64.

26 *Ekstsentrizm,* pp. 3–4.

27 ibid., pp. 3–4. FEKS also adhered to the concept of "impeded form", a version of the notion of *ostranenie,* or "making strange", developed later by Victor Shklovsky.

28 ibid., p. 2.

29 ibid., p. 4.

30 L.Z.Trauberg, "Ryzhii-na pomoshch", *Kinonedelia,* 11–12 (Leningrad, February 1924), p. 5.

31 D.Vertov, "My. Variant manifesta", *Kino-Fot,* 25–31 August 1922, pp. 11–12; cf. the translation by Kevin O'Brien in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* ed. Annete Michelson (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 6–7.

32 Vertov, "My. Variant manifesta", p. 11; *Kino-Eye,* p. 7.

33 L.D.Trotskii, "Vodka, tserkov' i kinematograf", *Pravda,* 12 July 1923, reprinted in *Voprosy by ta. Epokha "kul'turnichestva" i ee zadachi* (Moscow: Pravda, 1923). Reprinted as *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York: Monet, 1973), pp. 31–5.

34 Trotskii, "Vodka".

35 D.Vertov, "Kinoki. Perevorot", *Lef,* no. 3 (June-July 1923), p. 137.

36 ibid., pp. 140–1.

37 A.Logorno, "Meri Pikford i Duglas Ferbenks o Potemkine", *Sovetskii ekran,* 8 June 1928, p. 7.

38 *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my. Annotirovannyi katalog. Tom II: Nemye fil'my (1918–1935) (*Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961). p. 219. The film was reviewed in *Pravda* on 14 September 1927. It is not clear whether Fairbanks and Pickford knew that they were "starring" in a Soviet film or whether Komarov incorporated existing newsreel footage.

39 Richard Taylor, *The Politics of the Soviet Cinema, 1917–1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 95.

40 A.V.Lunarcharskii, "O kino". *Komsomol'skaia pravda,* 26 August 1925.

41 Reported in *Zhizn'iskusstva,* 24 January 1928.

42 Cited in G.M.Bolt'anskii (ed.), *Lenin i kino* (Moscow: Kinoizdatelstvo, 1925), pp. 16–17. The quotation should, however,

be treated with caution: it was almost de *rigueur* to justify policies by reference to Lenin at this time.

43 The proceedings of the conference were published as B.S.Ol'khovyi (ed.), *Puti kino: Pervoe vsesoiuznoe partiinoe soveshchanie po kinematografii* (Moscow: Tea-kino-pechat', 1929).

44 A suggestion implied in J.Grierson, "Summary and survey: 1935", in F.Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (London: Faber, 1966), p. 182.

45 S.M.Eisenshtein, V.I.Pudovkin and G.V.Aleksandrov, "Zaiavka", *Zhizn iskusstva,* 5 August 1928, pp. 4–5.

46 Richard Taylor, "Boris Shumyatsky and the Soviet cinema in the 1930s: ideology as mass entertainment", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television,* vol. 6, no. 1 (March 1986), pp. 43–64.

47 B.Z.Shumiatskii, *Kinematografiia millionov: Opyt analiza* (Moscow: Kinofotoizdat, 1935).

48 The Soviet concept of political education is thoroughly examined and well illuminated in P.Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 1985), pp. 1–17.

49 B.Z.Shumiatskii, "Dramaturgiia kino", *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 7 (1934), p. 4.

50 Shumiatskii, *Kinematografiia millionov,* p. 52.

51 B.Z.Shumiatskii, "Tvorcheskie zadachi templana", *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 12 (1933), p. 6.

52 ibid., p. 7.

53 S.M.Eisenshtein, "Montazh 1938", *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 1 (1939), p. 37.

54 Alexandrov's film *The Circus* was of course set in a circus, but the setting was not actively deployed in the way it would have been in the 1920s.

55 D.Macdonald, "Soviet society and its cinema", *Partisan Review,* vol. 6, no. 2 (January 1939), pp. 80–1.

56 Shumiatskii, *Kinematografiia millionov,* p. 242.

CHAPTER 3
Cinema as Social Criticism: The Early Films of Fridrikh Ermler

DENISE J. YOUNGBLOOD

In 1926 a movie was released that embodied all the characteristics that socially and politically active Soviet filmworkers and critics had demanded for the new Soviet picture—it dealt with contemporary problems, it had a plot and a hero; its style was realistic; it was entertaining and easily comprehensible. The pedigree of its obscure young director, moreover, was a propagandist's dream. He was a genuine proletarian, a party member, and a former Chekist.

The film was *Katka the Appleseller;* the director Fridrikh Ermler. Before the decade ended, Ermler produced three more movies that firmly established him in the forefront of Soviet cinema directors. These films, when considered together, present a coherent critique of Soviet society from the point of view of a political activist, and they laid the basis for one of the leading genres of Soviet cinema: the *bytovoi* film—a term used for films dealing with contemporary life.

THE EARLY FILMS: *KATKA THE APPLESELLER, THE PARISIAN COBBLER, HOUSE IN THE SNOWDRIFTS* AND *FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE*[1]

Although Ermler had directed two previous films, *Katka the Appleseller* was the true start of his remarkable career as a chronicler of Soviet life. Narratively, the film is a simple melodrama exposing the "dark side" of society during the New Economic Policy (NEP). A naïve peasant girl named Katka has come to Leningrad looking for factory work. Instead, she falls in with a gang of thieves and black-marketeers and has a child by the caddish ringleader of the gang, Semka. He of course refuses any

responsibility, and Katka sells apples on the street for her living. Yet the kind-hearted Katka can still take pity on someone worse off than herself—the former *intelligent* Vadka, who serves as a lookout for the street-vendors. Vadka moves in with Katka to help take care of her baby. After a number of adventures, including a failed suicide-attempt, Vadka becomes a man of action. He protects Katka and her child from the nefarious Semka, who with his new lover Verka—a shopgirl who bootlegs perfume[2]—is planning his first major crime: the robbery of a wealthy businessman. The villains foiled, both Vadka and Katka decide to go to work in a factory.

From this plot-outline, *Katka the Appleseller* sounds like what it was not—just another in a series of primitive Soviet melodramas peopled by caricatures instead of characters. Yet, with the exception of the clichéd ending, the film is an original look at the problems of NEP society. The inspired casting contributed to a large degree to the success of this film. Semka is played not by a debauched "bourgeois" character actor but by the attractive and athletic Valerii Solovtsov. His sidekick (Iakov Gudkin) and his girlfriend Verka (the sullenly pretty B.Chernova) are also meant to be members of a Soviet underclass, rather than the depraved remnants of the Tsarist *Lumpenproletariat*. Veronika Buzhinskaia, who made a specialty of such parts, brought a fresh naturalism to the somewhat one-dimensional rôle of Katka. The flatness of this character was more than counterbalanced by the vividness of Vadka, the quintessential superfluous man, affectionately portrayed by Fedor Nikitin. Nikitin, a great silent-film actor, dominates every scene he is in, and his Vadka is perhaps the oddest hero of the Soviet silent screen.[3]

Ermler's direction of his fine cast was deft, and the film—beautifully photographed—was shot on location in Leningrad, rather than in a studio. *Katka* is an entertaining film, but it none the less reveals a society in considerable disarray almost ten years after the Revolution. It is the first clear-cut critique in Soviet cinema of NEP society and the market economy that supported hooligans like Semka and Verka. The film reveals the inability of society to integrate not only obviously disaffected elements like the *intelligent* Vadka, but also a member of the masses, such as a peasant girl like Katka. Not only is she a nonproductive member of the new Soviet society, she is also an unwed mother on the fringes of a crime network. No social services exist to help Katka

and Vadka—and the Party is certainly nowhere to be seen—so they help each other in their curious symbiotic relationship. She is the breadwinner, as it were, and he the caretaker of home and child.

Katka the Appleseller, not surprisingly, received mixed reviews. In an article in *Pravda,* Khrisanf Khersonskii admired its simplicity, humor and acting, although he was understandably troubled by Katka's sudden transformation into a staunch proletarian.[4] *Soviet Cinema,* the organ of Glavpolitprosvet, applauded the creation of believable characters in a film that could be easily understood by the masses as an important step forward for Soviet cinema.[5] *Izvestiia,* on the other hand, criticized it for the very reasons that *Soviet Cinema* had praised it—that it was a simple melodrama.[6] The worst review appeared in the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography's *Cinema Front,* where K.Ganzenko admired only the cinematography. He thought the characters unbelievable, the acting poor, and the direction "naïve and empty", labeling the picture a "stereotyped, poster-line agit-film [based on] an alien way of life".[7] As time passed, these negative reactions faded. Adrian Piotrovskii, for example, singled out *Katka* as a film unusual for being both ideologically correct and profitable.[8] This refrain was repeated at the March 1928 Party Conference on Cinema Affairs, where *Katka* was praised as much for its low cost and profitability as for its contemporary theme.[9]

Ermler completed two movies in 1927, the year following *Katka,* but neither opened until 1928. *The Parisian Cobbler,* his fourth film to be released, seemed a logical progression in his work. Where *Katka* had been a slightly tentative attempt at a *bytovoi* film, *The Parisian Cobbler* was an assured and sharply didactic melodrama, with topical subject-matter and an ending unusual in Soviet cinema for its violence.

This film had its share of pre-release publicity. The co-author of the original script, the Serapion Brother Nikolai Nikitin, wrote a novella based on the scenario, which was published in *Red Virgin Soil* in the fall of 1927 and enjoyed a certain notoriety.[10] Like *Katka, The Parisian Cobbler* depicted an unmarried pregnant girl whose fate was connected, in this case involuntarily, with hooligans. Unlike *Katka,* which had treated general social problems of NEP Russia, *The Parisian Cobbler focused* on a specific social campaign —the campaign against loose sexual mores and abortion. This

campaign was connected with an attack on the Komsomol youth, among whom sexual license was supposedly rampant.[11]

The stars of the film were again Veronika Buzhinskaia and Fedor Nikitin. Buzhinskaia's innocent good looks were well suited to the rôle of Katia, the small-town working-class girl in trouble—a rôle virtually identical to her part in *Katka the Appleseller*. Nikitin, however, played not a struggling intellectual but the tradesman Kirik—a deaf-mute shoemaker known as the "Parisian Cobbler". Valerii Solovtsov continued to find new and subtle ways to portray iniquity—this time as the calculating young roué Andrei, who would do anything to get rid of his unwanted child. Iakov Gudkin, who was Semka's nameless underling in *Katka,* here is the primary villain—Motka Tundel, the kingpin of the local gang of hoodlums.

Sophisticated narrative development is no more a strong point in *The Parisian Cobbler* than in *Katka*. Katia learns she is pregnant and is rejected both by Andrei—when she refuses to have an abortion—and by her father. Andrei seeks counsel from his Komsomol *starosta* to no avail; the Komsomol cell's discussion of the situation also yields no result. Andrei, desperate, falls in with Motka Tundel and his thugs. The hooligans busy themselves spreading malicious rumors about Katia's supposed promiscuity, and they finally concoct a scheme to assault Katia, presumably so that she will miscarry. Hovering on the sidelines is Kirik, loving Katia but apparently helpless to assist her. Yet in the violent conclusion it is none other than the "disabled" Kirik who saves Katia, by attacking Motka Tundel.

Shot in the fluid realistic style that was Ermler's hallmark, *The Parisian Cobbler* is well crafted and superbly acted by all the principals, especially the gifted Nikitin. It continued the lines of development begun in *Katka the Appleseller;* for Ermler, unlike most other Soviet directors dealing with contemporary themes, there were not only Soviet heroes, but Soviet villains and Soviet problems as well. Ermler was emerging as a moralist with a dark view of Soviet life, yet a moralist who could make the message palatable. The film also had nuances which elevated it to a work of art, such as the imaginative use of a deaf-mute as a hero and the complex characterization of the selfish young anti-hero Andrei. *The Parisian Cobbler* made it plain that Soviet cinema had another star—a first-class director who could make socially relevant films that were intelligible and entertaining.

Reviewers were enthusiastic, but not uncritical. Khersonskii praised *The Parisian Cobbler* in *Pravda* as the most socially relevant picture of the winter season and drew attention to its fine acting, although he criticized the brutal conclusion as being unnecessarily melodramatic.[12] *Izvestiia's* N.Volkov concurred.[13] The cinema press praised *The Parisian Cobbler,* too. Mikhail Shneider in *Cinema Front* labeled it the first true *bytovoi* film, a "breath of fresh air" falling between trashy commercial pictures and the artistic, but avant-garde, films dominating the Soviet screen.[14] In *Soviet Screen* K.Feldman underscored the picture's use of "living material" as an important virtue.[15]

Both the Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARRK) and the Friends of Soviet Cinema (ODSK) held screenings and discussions of the film. ARRK's resolution praised *The Parisian Cobbler's* realistic depiction of Komsomol and worker life, as well as its cinematography and acting, but discerned elements of "aesthetitism" in it. ARRK also found troubling the lack of definitive answers to the problems raised and puzzled over the meaning of the film's title.[16] At a meeting of ARRK's directors' section, it was noted that the film was very profitable, which by implication went a long way toward absolving any shortcomings.[17] ODSK, too, found the film to be one of artistic significance, although it criticized the ambiguity of Kirik's class position, the strange title, and the "aestheticism" perceived in the film's beautiful shots of the outdoors.[18] Even though *The Parisian Cobbler* was released only shortly before the Party Conference on Cinema Affairs, it was favorably mentioned there several times.[19]

As stated above, *The Parisian Cobbler* seemed a logical successor to *Katka theAppleseller*. But, while it was the next film released after *Katka,* it was not in fact the next film Ermler made. That movie, released to a few second-run theaters in late March 1928, was *House in the Snowdrifts,* the story of a musician struggling to survive the bitter winter of 1919.

House in the Snowdrifts is a difficult film to situate thematicaily in Ermler's œuvre. This is exacerbated by the fact that half the film is no longer extant, and written descriptions of Ermler's work can be quite misleading since such descriptions tend to focus on plot rather than on characterization and style. Loosely based on Evgenii Zamiatin's very brief short story "The Cave", *House in the Snowdrifts* focuses on the battle of a member of the

pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia—of course played by Fedor Nikitin —for physical and spiritual survival after the Revolution. In contrast to*Katka the Appleseller* and *The Parisian Cobbler,* this film does not have a representative of the laboring classes in a central rôle. Although there is a subplot about the machinations of a speculator (Valerii Solovtsov), and another about a proletarian family, *House in The Snowdrifts* is above all else a moving and sympathetic portrayal of an individual devastated by the Revolution. The increasing desperation of the Musician drives him to steal not only wood, as in Zamiatin's story, but also a pet parrot which he uses to cook soup for his sick wife. This tragio-comic device skillfully serves as a metaphor for the total degradation of the Musician—what could be more loathsome to an artist than such an act?

House in the Snowdrifts broke Ermler's pattern of strict contemporaneity in subject-matter, but in most ways it can be considered a part of his œuvre. Although set in 1919, the movie does not even refer to the Civil War—a great heresy in the 1920s.[20] *House* is a film about a social problem: once again, the inability of Soviet society to integrate its populace. Overtly the theme of *Katka,* this idea is also the subtext of *The Parisian Cobbler.*

House was studiously ignored in the press with the exception of Khersonskii, who championed it in *Pravda,* He admired its "profound simplicity and truthfulness" and its humor and irony, calling Ermler a "director-lyricist of people, life *(byt)* and everyday revolution". Khersonskii castigated Sovkino for attempting to suppress the picture by relegating it to showings in workers' clubs and suburban theaters.[21] *Izvestiia's* Volkov described it non-commitally as a film about how "various social groups survived the terrible winter of 1919" and faintly admired its realistic treatment of the period. He criticized it, however, for being a film with nothing to say to the mass viewer.[22]

The discussion of *House* in ARRK was revealing. The scenarist Boris Leonidov reported that the script had been savaged in Sovkino's artistic (censorship) section, which understandably unnerved Ermler. Leonidov, however, vigorously defended the picture for showing that, while the intelligentsia were inherently passive, they were not beyond the Party's salvation. This somewhat disingenuous defense apparently had not fooled the censors, since Leonidov admitted that the picture had been

extensively reworked and permission for its release withheld nearly a year.

What Ermler—who was absent from this meeting—thought of the film was also a subject of debate. A letter from the critic Feldman was read into the record, in which he stated—on the basis of hearsay—that, while Ermler had indeed had doubts about *House* after its first studio screening, after its public showing he preferred it to *The Parisian Cobbler*. Ermler's views aside, *House* was fairly thoroughly condemned in ARRK, even by Ermler's old friend and associate Sergei Vasil'ev.[23]

Ermler's final silent—released in 1929 when the silent era was ending—was *Fragment of the Empire,* which is, quite simply, a great film.[24] Co-authored by Ermler and Katerina Vinogradskaia, the script is based on the true story of an amnesiac's recovery of his memory ten years after the Revolution. The difficult rôle of the peasant-worker-soldier Filimonov surely could not have been played by anyone other than Fedor Nikitin. He makes the unbelievable transformation believable, and Filimonov's return to memory is one of the most famous scenes in silent cinema.[25]

Fragment of the Empire opens in the Civil War, with Filimonov and a peasant woman who has befriended him stealing the boots from a dead soldier. The atmosphere is nightmarish rather than heroic or romantic—with scenes of a wounded boy, a dying dog and her orphaned pups, a savage White soldier. The story then leaps from the darkness of civil war to the light of Soviet power. After regaining his memory in a scene reminiscent of Proust and his madeleines, yet still unaware of the Revolution, Filimonov goes to "Peter" to search for his wife. Stunned by the wondrous and strange transformations in his city—skillfully wrought both by Ermler (through what he shows) and by Nikitin (in how he reacts) —Filimonov manages to find his former employer, now living in poverty. The ex-boss directs the puzzled Filimonov to the factory to look for work. Although the factory is clean, well lit, modern, the workers leave much to be desired. They mock the befuddled Filimonov in once scene; in another, Filimonov prevents a drunken worker from attacking an inspector. Filimonov does locate his wife (Veronika Buzhinskaia), but she has married a Soviet *apparatchik* (Valerii Solovtsov). The *apparatchik,* a "cultural worker", is crude and sullen; the wife a drudge. Filimonov, confronted by this scene of domestic discord, sees in the face of the *apparatchik* the drunken factory worker and the murderous White soldier merged

into one. His wife decides that the comfort of her present life is worth its spiritual degradation, and she does not return to Filimonov.

Filimonov has found a new, and clearly positive, start in life under Soviet power. But what of most of the others in the film? The crafty peasant woman continues to scratch out a marginal existence; the oddly sympathetic "former person", Filimonov's old employer, is sunk in poverty; Filimonov's wife endures abuse for creature comforts; the model factory is a scene of taunts, drunkenness and assaults; the *apparatchik* is surely no improvement on a *chinovnik*. More than any other Ermler film, *Fragment of the Empire* shows Ermler's pride in the achievements of the Revolution, throwing his critical, politically left-wing view of Soviet society into even sharper relief.

Ippolit Sokolov, in the Moscow journal *Cinema,* gave *Fragment* the review it deserved. He praised its brilliant technique, its stylistic unity, its powerful emotional appeal and, especially, Nikitin's triumphant performance.[26] The critics from Leningrad's *The Life of Art* aligned solidly behind the film. Vladimir Nedobrovo thought it the best film of the year; Adrian Piotrovskii a dialectical ideal; O.Adamovich a "great revolutionary film".[27] *But Fragment of the Empire,* despite the immediate unanimity on its virtues, soon became a weapon in the battle between the innovative Leningrad filmmakers and the "reactionary front" in Moscow.[28]

Izvestiia's critic N.Osinskii actually reviewed the film fairly favorably, going so far as to call it "one of the best" of the season. He thought none the less that Ermler was wavering between the "modernist" Leningrad film school and the socialist realism of Moscow's studios. He praised Nikitin's acting as extremely realistic but criticized Ermler's negative treatment of Soviet life, and the fact that Filimonov's burgeoning class-consciousness was less vivid than his recovery of memory.[29] B.Alpers in *Soviet Screen,* which is also a Moscow journal, admired the picture for its construction, acting and human interest, although he discerned in it "psychologism" and the sinister influence of Dovzhenko.[30]

Ia. Rudoi, however, was unequivocally critical in the same journal: "Why is it counted the highest artistic achievement to give a picture a thick layer of symbolism?…This obviously leads to a break with realistic forms in the mind of the mass viewer." Cinematic material should not be, as it was in *Fragment,* according

to Rudoi, shrouded in a "fog of symbolism" because it would estrange the viewer.[31] By 1930 the film was regularly included in lists of formalist films—even, sadly, in one compiled by the picture's early admirer Sokolov, who now saw *Fragment of the Empire* as the epitome of the "most basic danger in Soviet cinema".[32]

Some time in 1930, Fridrikh Ermler abruptly announced his retirement from cinema. He entered the Communist Academy as a student.

FRIDRIKH ERMLER

Ermler's friend and competitor, director Grigori Kozintsev, has written that he never understood why Ermler, after making a truly great film, quit the cinema. Others who knew him well, like the scenarist and critic Mikhail Bleiman, also found him, and his work, enigmatic.[33]

The elusive man who made the films that were on the one hand a far-reaching "left" critique of NEP society and on the other a sympathetic portrayal of Soviet society's outcasts was born Vladimir Breslav in the Latvian river-town of Rezekne in 1898.[34] His family was Jewish; their pre-Revolutionary estate *meshchane*. His cabinetmaker father emigrated to America in 1905, never to return, leaving Ermler's mother with five children to raise. Ermler apparently learned to read and write at home; but he was, in his own words, "almost illiterate". He went to work as an errand boy for a druggist when he was twelve. The job apparently was not too onerous, for he had time to pore over cheap novels—and to sneak off to the movies. By 1913, Rezekne had a movie-theater, the "Diana", and Ermler fell obsessively in love with films. Even though he wrote with difficulty, he attempted a scenario, but his real dream was to become an actor. In 1915, amazingly, he managed to get to Moscow; when he innocently asked a policeman where the movie-studios were, his heavy accent betrayed him. Since he could not produce a passport, he was put on the next train back home, feeling lucky that he had not been arrested.

Ermler was drafted in 1916, but deserted shortly thereafter and went to Petrograd, where he was caught and sent to Krasnoe Selo as part of the 171st Infantry.[35] He is vague about his activities during 1917, but by 1918 he was working for the Revolutionary

Military Commissariat as a spy. He spoke German, and as "Fridrikh Ermler" he carried out more than twenty missions behind enemy lines, mainly in German-occupied Latvia and Poland, and spent some time in prison in Wilno. In late 1919 he was invited to join the Party, and in 1920 he entered the Cheka, the Special Section of the 4th Infantry Division. He worked first in intelligence and later, when the Cheka was dissolved, for the GPU. He was sent to Samara in 1921, where he served as assistant to the head of the Special Section and as a member of the Revolutionary Military Tribunal.[36] It was during this tumultuous period of revolution and civil war that Ermler first began to read seriously (Tolstoy) and was introduced to opera. Despite his romance with the Revolution, he never gave up his dream of becoming a movie actor.

In 1923 he arrived at the door of the Leningrad Institute of Screen Arts. Upon being informed by the student at the gate that he could not just walk in, that he had to be chosen, Ermler pulled out his Browning pistol and said: "*This* has selected me."[37] Ermler continued to work for the GPU for an unspecified time after he enrolled in the film institute,[38] and he was treated with considerable caution by his fellow-students. He was believed always to be armed, and Aleksandra Glama-Meshcherskaia, the redoubtable doyenne of the institute, never extended him her hand to kiss.[39] He even had one student, Iakov Gudkin, arrested on theft charges, but it is a measure of Ermler's brash charm that Gudkin overcame his distrust to become a member of Ermler's loyal following.[40] Ermler also found the time, between his classes, to organize and serve as secretary of the institute's party/Komsomol cell.

In 1924 his nearly decade-old dream was realized when he was cast in two films: *Tea,* a one-reel agitfilm, and *Red Partisans,* a full-length Civil War adventure.[41] The parts were small, but Ermler was bitterly disappointed in his performances. With characteristic decisiveness, he gave up acting to become a film director.

To attain his new goal, Ermler organized his own production collective, the Experimental Cinema Workshop (KEM). KEM's stated aims were: to guard the film institute from counter-revolutionary influences, to prepare cinema actors, and to make only strictly contemporary films. KEM's primary focus in practice was definitely on acting, reflecting the interests of its organizer. Its

slogans were "No feelings! No transformations!" and "Down with Stanislavsky! Long live Meyerhold!" Ermler admitted all he knew about Stanislavsky at the time was that he was a gentleman and about Meyerhold that he was a Jew and a communist. Ermler wanted film acting—and, indeed, all aspects of filmmaking—to be considered a trade; using a simile which recalled his origins, he wrote in one of the original KEM manifestos that a film worker should be "like a cabinetmaker, who knows his wood, tools".[42]

The year 1924 was a busy one for Ermler. Not only did he begin and end his career as an actor and found KEM, he also left the Leningrad Institute of Screen Arts, apparently without graduating, and worked first for Sevzapkino as secretary to the scientific-art council and then as an assistant to director P.P.Petrov-Bytov. After Petrov-Bytov fired him, Ermler persuaded Sevzapkino to finance a one-reel educational film called *Scarlatina,* which Mikhail Bleiman says was an extremely bizarre comedy done in an avant-garde style. It was "scandalously unsuccessful"—literally never booked by theater agents.[43]

Ermler's next film was *Children of the Storm* (1926), a Civil War adventure. Krupskaia herself had approved the script, so Leningradkino was looking for a party member to direct. Ermler got his second chance. The film was rather ordinary, according to all accounts, although Bleiman in *Leningradskaia pravda* saw promise in the direction despite the terrible script.[44]

Ermler's third film was *Katka the Appleseller,* and his career, as we know, took off. Since neither *Scarlatina* nor *Children of the Storm* is extant, it is difficult to know whether *Katka* is really that much better than her predecessors. Yet, while one would expect to see increasing mastery of the medium in the early films of a young director, there was an important difference between Ermler's first two films and the four that followed. The new element was Fedor Nikitin, the brilliant actor who starred in Ermler's last four silents.

ERMLER AND NIKITIN[45]

Ermler's relationship with Nikitin was certainly the most important of his early career. Understanding this relationship, therefore, is crucial to understanding both Ermler's personality and the character of his work.

Fedor Nikitin was the son of a military officer, which probably means he came from a gentry family.[46] A born silent-film star, he trained at the Moscow Art Theater (MKhT), but left Moscow in 1926 for Leningrad's Bolshoi Dramatic Theater. To make ends meet, he had to look for film work, and he auditioned for Ermler, who was casting *Katka the Appleseller*. Ermler laughed when the 26-year-old actor told him that he wanted to play Iago, but Ermler offered Nikitin the rôle of Vadka Zarazhin anyway. After overcoming his initial shock at the thought of playing in a "popular" film, Nikitin felt comfortable with Vadka since "like him, I was alien to the conquering class".

Nikitin definitely felt alienated from Ermler, whom he obviously viewed as the quintessential representative of the victorious proletariat. From the beginning, their relations were strained, even though Ermler made every effort to go along with the precepts of Nikitin's MKhT training. For example, Nikitin spent several days playing a beggar on the streets of Leningrad, until he was convincing enough to be given alms. In fact Ermler's coddling of the temperamental Nikitin annoyed the other members of the cast, most of them KEM members. Everyone involved in the making of *Katka* agreed that the level of animosity between Nikitin and the rest of the crew was high.[47] Nikitin was particularly irritated by the collective's condescending attitude toward theater in general and the Stanislavsky method in particular. He was also grealty annoyed by Ermler's informal manners, preferring the theater, where he was "Fedor Mikhailovich", addressed with the formal "you", to Ermler's calling him familiarly "Fedka" and "ty".

Katka's success with the public pleased Nikitin, but he considered that he had definitely broken with Ermler and his group after shooting had ended. Nikitin was therefore taken by surprise when Eduard loganson, *Katka's* co-director, approached him on Ermler's behalf.[48] The rôle Ermler offered Nikitin through Ioganson was that of the Musician in *House in the Snowdrifts*. Nikitin identified closely with this character and reported that he and Ermler worked on the picture in relative harmony.

Despite the temporary improvement in their relations, Nikitin was extremely reluctant to take on the rôle of Kirik Rudenko, the deaf-mute shoemaker in *The Parisian Cobbler*. He simply could not see himself playing a handicapped member of the working class, but apparently Ermler overcame his misgivings by appealing to his

professional pride. To help Nikitin "prepare" for this rôle, Ermler sent him to a deaf-mute colony near Pavlovsk. Nikitin was enthralled by the experience, only to be affronted by Ermler's amusement at his enthusiasm. The old grievances flared up, but again Nikitin was pleased with the finished film and with the acclaim it brought him.

Friction between Ermler and Nikitin was at its highest since *Katka the Appleseller* when filming began on *Fragment of the Empire*. Once more, Nikitin did not consider the rôle of a worker-soldier suitable for the MKhT-trained son of a Tsarist army officer, and he grudgingly accepted the part only after Ermler cajoled him. Although Ermler had previously been willing to allow Nikitin a great deal of time for Stanislavskian "experiencing" of his rôle, *Fragment of the Empire* was the first of Ermler's productions troubled by cost overruns.[49] While Ermler had increasingly little patience with the time Nikitin needed to prepare for his parts, he did take Nikitin to a mental hospital to visit the actor Evgenii Boronikhin (star of *Palace and Fortress),* now hopelessly insane.

In the end it was Nikitin's need for "experiencing" which drove the final wedge between actor and director. In *Fragment,* Filimonov's return to memory is triggered by the sound of a bell, and Nikitin was sitting in a corner of the set ringing the bell and working through his responses when Ermler ordered him to resume shooting. Nikitin refused, still ringing the bell. Ermler called him again; Nikitin kept ringing the bell. Ermler drew the actor aside and asked if he intended to begin the scene. Nikitin said he did not. Ermler, "foaming at the mouth", whipped out a revolver, and told Nikitin he would be shot if he did not get in front of the camera immediately. Nikitin, terrified, did as he was told, but the greatest collaboration between actor and director in Soviet silent cinema was over. They never worked together again.

Ermler and Nikitin were a study in opposites—the proletarian and the aristocrat; the failed actor who had denounced Stanislavsky and the method actor who was one of the most brilliant in silent films. Yet Ermler's persistent wooing of Nikitin provides a number of important clues to the character of his *œuvre*. The rhetoric of the early KEM manifestos aside, Ermler was an instinctive realist in the tradition of Russian realism and the Moscow Art Theater. He was a follower of Stanislavsky without knowing it. Ermler did, however, know talent and how to

develop it when he found it; if Nikitin made Ermler's films great, Ermler "made" Nikitin. Unlike Nikitin, Ermler ne ver let class background influence his professional judgement.[50]

Nikitin's dislike of Ermler was visceral, and it was difficult for him to be objective about the director. Yet even he admits, almost with a sense of wonder, that it was Ermler who challenged him to new professional heights; that it was Ermler who gave him the best rôles of his long career in films. The unity of contradictions that was Ermler and Nikitin was certainly destined to fail, but it is a tribute to Ermler that the fragile alliance survived as long as it did.

THE KEY FILMS: *THE PARISIAN COBBLER* AND *FRAGMENT OF AN EMPIRE*

Ermler's relationship with Nikitin provides insight into the making of the silent films—a process which owed a great deal to the style and training of the *intelligent* Nikitin. Yet it does not explain the most curious feature of Ermler's *œuvre:* the director's affinity for intellectuals and outcasts as heroes. None of these films was conceived as a vehicle for Nikitin; ideas always came first for Ermler.

Oddly enough, it is *The Parisian Cobbler,* Ermler's first film that did not have an *intelligent* as its central character, which begins to provide clues to the riddle. Employing a deaf-mute as a hero is unusual, though certainly not unprecedented. Nikitin, as we know, was not keen to take on the rôle. This deaf-mute, furthermore, is known as the "Parisian Cobbler", a title with foreign and decadent overtones which aroused disapproval. Ermler was a calculating filmmaker. He did nothing by chance in his work, and the fact that Nikolai Nikitin, the scenarist, did *not* entitle his published novella "The Parisian Cobbler", and indeed made Kirik an ice-cream vendor instead of a shoemaker, supports my belief that both details were Ermler's idea.[51]

Kirik is a romantic, which characterization is reinforced not only by his actions, but also by the name of his shop. Ermler, too, was a romantic. The grip that his Civil War experiences held on him, demonstrated most vividly by his retention of his "German" spy name, was romantic to the core.[52] Furthermore, Ermler, as we have seen, believed filmmaking was a craft, not an art, so that he, like Kirik, can be thought of as a craftsman. But Ermler's identification with Kirik may be carried one step further. I am

proposing, at the risk of seeming unduly speculative, that Ermler considered himself a figurative mute. References to his embarrassment over his accent, his inability to write and speak fluently and gracefully are frequent in his autobiographical writings, brief though they are.[53]

Kirik differs from prevous Ermler heroes in that he is not an intellectual, but he is as much an outsider as were Vadka and the Musician. The cobbler stands on the edge of his world owing to his disability, just as Ermler stood on the outskirts of his. The Leningrad school of filmmaking in the twenties was highly intellectual, both in style and in the background of the directors, and Ermler longed to be a part of this tight-knit community. But, as Kirik was doomed to be a misfit, so Ermler was set apart from other film directors owing to his lack of breeding and education. The fact that Ermler was a man of strong intellectual bent, self-taught, and well known as a voracious reader of *belles-lettres* could never overcome his "disability". Like Kirik, however, Ermler was a man of action, and this was his salvation. He expressed in films what he could not express verbally in his dealings with his peers. Considering the psychological resonance of this film for Ermler, it is small wonder that he described *The Parisian Cobbler* as being "the end of my childhood in films".[54]

It was in *Fragment of the Empire* that Ermler came into his own as a director. In this film, he frankly acknowledged his intellectual leanings—now expressed stylistically rather than through a surrogate intellectual. He also acknowledged his own class background. His hero is not an *intelligent,* but a worker. It is as though Ermler, like Filimonov, had recovered from amnesia. Filimonov is, of course, as much an outsider as Ermler and other Ermler characters, but one who comes to maturity during the film in a fully realized and believable way.

Fragment of the Empire, which provoked the painful break with Nikitin, ironically brought Ermler his long-sought acceptance in the Leningrad film community. Ermler does not mention his Order of Lenin, or any of his many awards, in his memoirs; the greatest honor of his life seems to have been the telegrams of congratulation he received from Kozintsev and Eisenstein on *Fragment*. His pride at this, recorded thirty years after the fact, is truly touching.[55]

Yet *Fragment of the Empire,* the film that was his ticket into the inner circle of the cinema community, was also the film that led to

his estrangement from his party. One can only imagine the blow that the "war on formalism"—directed as it was against this picture—must have been. Ermler was a Bolshevik through and through, and he could not forget that he owed his education to the scandal over *Fragment of the Empire,* or to his reasons for quitting cinema, but is it really so surprising that he announced his retirement and entered the Communist Academy?

CODA: *COUNTERPLAN*

Ermler's life from 1930 to 1932 is a virtual blank.[56] Although legend has it that he was called out of retirement to co-direct *Counterplan* with Sergei Yutkevich, according to his own recollections he was working on a sound project then in its preliminary stages.[57] This order for an "industrial" film, which apparently came from the highest echelons of the Party, was particularly onerous to Ermler, who had made his opposition to directors being assigned topics public at the 1928 Party Conference on Cinema Affairs.[58] Ermler and Yutkevich were told in January 1932 that they were being commissioned to do a film on industrialization for the fifteenth anniversary of the Revolution.[59] It had to be finished by 7 November, but they had not even been given a treatment, let alone a script. After "harsh disagreements", according to Ermler, the two directors decided on a narrative of a factory's efforts against opposition to meet a counterplan. The best Ermler could say about the picture was: "I had no feelings for the themes. The idea of *Counterplan* didn't excite me very much, but I understand [sic] that it was what we needed."

The crew worked round the clock—Ermler filming and Yutkevich editing. Ermler finished shooting at 7 am on 26 October, the day the film was to be screened for Sovkino's top brass. *Counterplan* was roundly condemned at the Sovkino screening and at the one held on 27 October for Glavrepertkom. Ermler and Yutkevich swore they were finished with filmmaking. They recut the film before 7 November, and the new version was improved enough to be released.

Counterplan is a rather ordinary film, even for Yutkevich who was not nearly as gifted a director as Ermler. The script they struggled over is mediocre: the characters' motivations are unconvincing, and the plot is drama tu rgically weak. An elderly nonparty worker overcomes his initial resistance to the factory's

counterplan. With the help of the factory's party secretary, he thwarts the machinations of the engineer-wrecker and wins his fellow-workers over to the plan.

Yet *Counterplan* is not entirely a loss. Although it is essentially a talkie, Ermler and Yutkevich used Shostakovich's score effectively, and they tried a few new tricks with sound, such as employing a voice offscreen to indicate a presence in a room without showing it. Both directors had exhibited strong pictorialism in their silent works, and since Leningrad is an uncommonly photogenic subject there are moments of uncommon beauty in *Counterplan*. Considering the dull script and poor characterization, the acting was fairly good, especially that of Vladimir Gardin as the old worker Babchenko. And Ermler had not entirely forgotten his affinity for outcasts—an alcoholic foreman in the film is treated with sympathy.

The film was supposedly popular with viewers;[60] whether or not that was true, *Counterplan* was showered with praise in *Cinema* and elsewhere. The only exception was Viktor Shklovskii's frank review (also in *Cinema)* which called a failure a failure.[61] *Pravda's* reviewer L.Ginzburg commended the film for showing the "real life of the Soviet factory" and the rôle of the Party therein, although, interestingly enough, he criticized *Counterplan* for being *too* positive. Apparently the ease with which the counterplan was achieved in the film did not justify the strenuous exhortations for "bolshevik tempo" appearing daily in the press, so more workers should have been shown taking an active rôle against it.[62]

The review which appeared in *Izvestiia* was extremely revealing, both about the politics of the times and about Ermler's future in cinema. P.A.Bliakhin, unlike many of the critics reviewing movies in the 1930s, was a scenarist and knew a thing or two about films. He praised *Counterplan* for focusing on individuals, then attacked the very details which individualized them—like the party secretary's love for his friend's wife—as being superfluous. Bliakhin avoided directly criticizing the hero of the film, the worker Babchenko, but pointed out that he was old, ordinary, not a party member, and certainly not heroic.

After Bliakhin asserted that Ermler and Yutkevich had decisively rejected the "aestheticism" of their silent works, he turned to the very scene that repudiated his assertion: the party secretary's walk along the Neva during the "white nights" could certainly be considered a formalist element.[63] This curiously polite review,

which was struggling to be a socialist realist critique of the movie, indicates that *Counterplan,* despite its deficiencies, did indeed have the party's imprimatur. *Counterplan* was regularly cited for several years as a film to emulate;[64] but Bliakhin was right—it was no more a model of socialist realism than it was a good film.

This disappointing production marked a turning-point in Ermler's film career, but by no means its end. Although he was not as prolific as a director like Sergei Gerasimov, he would make nine more feature films before his death in 1967, including two of the most famous (or infamous) films of the 1930s: *Peasants* and *The Great Citizen*. These later works, however, belong to another period and have another place in the history of Soviet film. Whether he worked less than one might have expected owing to his increasingly bad health or to his iconoclasm will probably never be known.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ERMLER AND HIS WORK

If influence is the criterion for determining the significance of a film director, then Fridrikh Ermler is perhaps the most important director in Soviet film history. Certainly he was one of its major talents, and *Fragments of an Empire* will stand, as it has for nearly sixty years, as one of the greatest achievements of silent cinema.

Ermler's *œuvre,* quite apart from its historical value in documenting the social life of the 1920s and the critique of NEP society by the Party's left wing, laid the foundation for the genre known in Soviet cinema as *bytovoi. Bytovoi* films were in great demand in the 1920s, since the genre was seen to be particularly "Soviet" in its ability to combine entertainment value with didacticism. From 1928 to 1934, this genre accounted for 30–50 percent of Soviet film production, until political circumstances made the critical venture into contemporary concerns too risky.[65]

In the 1970s the *bytovoi* film in the Ermler style enjoyed a significant revival, with the release of films like *May I Have a Word, Afonia, The Bonus* and *Several Interviews on a Personal Question.* Each of these dealt with social problems critically and unsentimentally, with the humanity and realistic attention to detail which had characterized Ermler's work. These films were also distinguished by the superb ensemble acting that was perhaps Ermler's most lasting legacy to Soviet cinema. The genre has been

in eclipse, but there are strong signs that it will flourish again under Gorbachev if he continues his predilection to shake up Soviet society.[66]

Ermler's work, as we have seen, has historical and artistic significance for Soviet cinema in several respects. But since his remarkable life so deeply affected his film art and was so intimately connected to the Revolution one cannot close without remarking on Ermler as a Soviet success-story. It is both ironic and somehow fitting that Fedor Nikitin, the actor who was crucial to the silent films yet totally alienated from Ermler, should provide a commentary on this very point:

> I am happy that for three years I was Fridrikh Ermler's comrade-in-arms. The semi-literate druggist's boy from Rezhitsa [Rezekne], next a soldier for the Revolution, the producer of the most talented cinematic chronicles of the party, a director of world-wide fame—surely one hears in this fairy-tale biography the mighty wind of October.[67]

NOTES

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1 All discussions of films are based on my own viewing-notes unless otherwise indicated.

2 Verka is a typical female criminal of the period. See Louise Shelley, "Female criminality in the 1920s: a consequence of inadvertent and deliberate change", *Russian History/Histoire russe,* vol. 9, nos 2–3 (1982), p. 269.

3 The character of Vadka caused great concern in the studio's artistic council, which had to approve the script. Ermler was instructed not to develop the part too much. "O stsenarii *Kat'ka bumazhnii ranet* (Iz protokoly khudozhestvennogo soveta kinofabriki Leningradkino, mar.—apr. 1926)", in I.V.Sepman (ed.), *Fridrikh Ermler: Dokumenty, stat'i, vospominaniia* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1974), pp. 106–7 (hereafter cited as *Ermler*). (Because this book is rare in the United States, I will list alternative sources for the documents where available.)

4 Khrisanf Khersonskii, "Kino: *Kat'ka bumazhnii ranet*", *Pravda, 5* January 1927.

5 "*Katyka* [sic] *bumazhnii ranet*", *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 2 (1927), pp. 30–1.

6 N.V[olkov], "Teatr—muzyka—kino: Novye kinokartiny", *Izvestiia,* 9 January 1927. Volkov did admire the editing and cinematography.

7 K.Ganzenko, "Sovetskii byt na sovetskom ekrane", *Kino-front,* no. 1. (1927), pp. 9–10. ARK was the chief professional organization. For a detailed discussion of its activities, see Denise J.Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–1935,* Studies in Cinema No. 35 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985), passim.

8 Adrian Piotrovskii, "K.partsoveshchaniiu o kinorabote (ili 'Ob ideologii i kommertsii')", *Zhizn'iskusstva,* no. 37 (1927), p. 5.

9 Vladimir Kirshon put the figure at 28,000 rubles; see B.S.Ol'khovyi (ed.), *Puti kino: Pervoe vsesoiuznoe partiinoe soveshchanie po kinematografii* (Moscow: Tea-kino-pechat', 1929), p. 79.

10 Nikolai Nikitin, "Prestuplenie Kirika Rudenko", *Krasnaia nov',* nos 9–11 (1927); reprinted in Nikolai Nikitin, *Prestuplenie Kirika Rudenko; Pogovorim o zvezdakh: Povesti* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1966). There seems to be confusion among contemporary Soviet filmwriters on this point. Both I.V.Sepman and V.P.Borovkov state that the film was based on the story; see Sepman, "Kinematograf Fridrikha Ermlera", in *Ermler,* p. 27, and Borovkov, *Fedor Nikitin* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), p. 54. Adrian Piotrovskii, on the other hand, wrote that it was the first Soviet "novelization" of a film: see *Kinofikatsiia iskusstv* (Leningrad: Izd. avtora, 1929), p. 43. The émigré Soviet scenarist Paul Babitsky confirms this: see Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry* (New York: Praeger, 1955), p. 130.

11 For an article on the sexual mores of Soviet youth during this period and contemporary concern about it, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Sex and revolution: an examination of literary and statistical criminality; data on the mores of Soviet students in the 1920s", *Journal of Modern History,* vol. 50, no. 2 (June 1978), pp. 252–78. See also Shelley, "Female criminality", pp. 265–84.

12 Krisanf Khersonskii, "Kino: *Parizhskii sapozhnik*", *Pravda,* 14 February 1928.

13 N.Volkov, "Teatr—muzyka—kino: Po moskovskim ekranom (Kino-obzor)", *Izvestiia,* 11 April 1928. Volkov also criticized the ending.

14 Mikhail Shneider, "*Parizhskii sapozhnik", Kino-front,* no. 2 (1928), pp. 22–5. Shneider was troubled by the character of Andrei (was he a negative hero or "insufficiently positive"?) and by what he termed an "almost Khanzhonkovian lack of motivation".

15 K.Fel'dman, "Chto na ekrane", *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 6 (1928), p. 13.

16 TsGALI, f. 2494, op. 1, ed. khr. 171, "Protokol diskussii po obsuzhdeniiu kinofil' ma *Parizshkii sapozhnik,* 24 ianv. 1928". The

Association of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARK) became the Association of Workers of Revolutionary Cinematography (ARRK) in September 1928.

17 TsGALI, f. 2494, op. 1, ed. khr. 213, "Stenogramma zasedaniia rezhisserskoi sektsii ARRKe o stsenarnom krizise".

18 The ARRK and ODSK resolutions used the same words when criticizing the aestheticism of the film; see D.Donat, "*Parizhskii sapozhnik*" and "ODSK o *Parizhskom sapozhnike*", *Kino,* no. 7 (1928).

19 See in *Puti kino,* e.g., the remarks of Krinitskii, p. 24; Kirshon, p. 79; and Meshcheriakov, p. 103. Trainin, p. 139, confirms Ermler's statement, p. 324, that the film had a hard time getting approved by Glavrepertkom. Trainin said it was because of co-author Boris Leonidov's political difficulties.

20 See, e.g., the attacks on Preobrazhenskaia's *Peasant Women of Riazan* recounted in Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema,* pp. 150–1.

21 Khrisanf Khersonskii, "Kino: *Dom v sugrobakh*", *Pravda,* 7 April 1928. K.Fel'dman confirmed Khersonskii's assertion that the film never had a "first run": "*Dom v sugrobakh*", *Kino,* no. 14 (1928).

22 Volkov, "Teatr—muzyka—kino: Po moskovskim ekranam".

23 TsGALI, f. 2494, op. 1, ed. khr. 149, "Stenogramma diskussii po obsuzhdeniiu kinofil'ma *Dom v sugrobakh,* 6 apr. 1928".

24 I have argued elsewhere that it is the most important film in Soviet silent cinema. See Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema,* p. 208.

25 Paul Rotha has said it best: "From a psychological point of view, the direction of Ermler was amazing. The subconscious process of the man's mind, particularly in the return of his memory through an association of latent ideas, was portrayed with an extraordinary power. From death to emptiness, from emptiness to perplexity, from perplexity to understanding, the changing mental states were subtly revealed. As a representation of mental images, of reactions, of subconscious thought, the film was remarkable": *The Film Till Now* (1930; reprinted London: Spring Books, 1967), p. 249. The scene "remains one of the finest examples of associative editing": *The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film Circulating Programs* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), p. 21.

26 Ippolit Sokolov, "*Oblomok imperil*", *Kino,* no. 38 (1929), p. 2.

27 In *Zhizn' iskusstva,* 1929, see Vladimir Nedobrovo, "Oblomok imperii", no. 36, p. 7, and "Kino pod znakom, rekonstruktsii", no. 42, pp. 9–10; Adrian Piotrovskii, "Dialekticheskaia forma v kino i front kino-reaktsii", no. 41, p. 3, and "Za materialisticheskuiu dialektiku v kino protiv nastupaiushchei kino reaktsii", no. 47, pp. 2–3; and O.Adamovich, "Glazami bol'shevika: Zametki o tvorchestve Fridrikha Ermlera", no. 47, pp. 4–5.

28 See the discussion of the "war on formalism" in Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema,* pp. 194–214.
29 N.Osinskii, "*Oblomok imperii*", *Izvestiia,* 3 November 1929.
30 B.Alpers, "*Oblomok imperii*", *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 38 (1929).
31 Ia.Rudoi, "Nasha kinematografiia i massovoi zritel'", *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 37(1929), p. 17. Similar remarks were made at the Sovkino screening ; see "Iz stenogrammy zasedanii pravleniia kinofabriki Sovkino: Diskussiia po povodu kartiny *Oblomok imperii,* 6 avg. 1929", *Ermler,* pp. 114–20.
32 See, e.g., "K itogam kinosezona", *Kino izhizn',* no. 15 (1930), and Sokolov, "Korni formalizma", *Kino,* no. 17 (1930).
33 G.Kozintsev, "Slovo o druge", *Ermler,* p. 295 (originally *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 7, 1969), and M.Bleiman, "Neskol'ko zagadok", *Ermler,* pp. 276–85. The latter is a perceptive and elegantly written piece.
34 Unless otherwise attributed, biographical data on Ermler was gleaned from his autobiographical writings: "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 7 (1969), pp. 109–36 (published posthumously); and from *Ermler* ("Avtobiograficheskie zametki", pp. 90–6, and a questionnaire he completed in 1925, "Anketnyi list no. 71", p. 87).
35 Ermler tells two different stories here. This version is drawn from "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", p. 10. In "Avtobiograficheskie zametki", pp.92–3, he implies that he returned to the Army voluntarily because he could not break into the Petrograd studios.
36 V.Bakun, "Neskol'ko slov o lichnom", *Ermler,* p. 327. The author was his wife, actress Vera Bakun .
37 Sergei Vasil'ev was the student at whom the Browning was pointed; he was to become one of Ermler's early collaborators (in KEM), and of course the director of *Chapaev*.
38 Bakun, "Neskol'ko slov", p. 327.
39 Ia.Gudkin, "Riadovoi kemovskogo otriada", *Iz istorii Lenfil'ma: Stot'i, vospominaniia, dokumenty, 1920-e gody,* p 2 (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1970), p. 115.
40 ibid. Gudkin's memoir is fascinating in its own right and powerfully depicts the poverty of the students at the institute.
41 *Red Partisans* survives (although I have not seen it); *Tea* does not.
42 "Osnovnoe polozhenie kinoeksperimental'noi masterskoi", *Iz istorii Lenfil'ma,* pt 2, p. 229. See also in this volume "Ustav kinoeksperimental'noi masterskoi", p. 231, for an additional statement on KEM's goals.
43 Bleiman, "Neskol'ko zagadok", p. 277, Bleiman says Ermler was always embarrassed when *Scarlatina* was mentioned.

44 Bleiman, *"Deti buri", O kino: Svidetel'skie pokazaniia (1924–71)* (Moscow; Iskusstvo, 1973), p. 74. This review originally appeared in *Leningradskaia pravda,* 18 August 1926.

45 The factual material of this section is drawn from Nikitin's exceptionally frank memoirs: "Iz vospominaniia kinoaktera", *Iz istorii Lenfil'ma,* pt 2, pp. 75–111; and "Sudite sami", *Ermler,* pp. 302–5, unless otherwise attributed. (The latter originally appeared in *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 4,1969.)

46 Borovkov, *Fedor Nikitin,* p. 11. Nikitin himself was discreet about his origins.

47 Gudkin supports Nikitin's recollections: see "Riadovoi kemovskogo otriada", p. 128. Ermler was silent on the subject and never expressed (in writing anyway) anything but praise for Nikitin.

48 Nikitin greatly admired Ioganson, about whom little is known. Ermler seems to feel the need to justify his connection with Ioganson by saying he used Ioganson in the early films for his technical expertise: see "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", p. 117. Gudkin mentions that Ioganson was also a member of the Cheka: "Riadovoi kemovskogo otriada", p. 125.

49 For the full story of the troubled production of *Fragment,* see Ermler's accounts in "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", pp. 127–8, and "Ob *Oblomke imperil*", *Ermler,* pp. 111–12. Sergei Eisenstein viewed the rushes and criticized the film severely, which sent a panicked Ermler back to reshoot as much as he could afford to.

50 Ermler's disdain for reflexive "class consciousness" is best-documented in his remarks to the 1928 Party Conference on Cinema Affairs. He was the only film director invited to address the meeting, probably because he was the best-known director who was also a parry member. Ermler complained that studio jobs were going to untrained individuals because of their class or party background: "I have seen many examples where people have come to work in the studio who could work in the field of geology with as much success. They not only have no understanding of cinematography, they don't even have simple, elementary knowledge.... In the Leningrad studios, I know of four cases where kids are working only because they are in the Komsomol." See *Puti kino,* p. 322.

51 Ermler says he always co-authored the scripts of his films, whether or not his name appeared on the credits; see "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", p. 125.

52 Bakun, "Neskol'ko slov", p. 328.

53 For examples of Ermler's sensitivity about his accent, etc., see "Avtobiograficheskie zametki", p. 91, and "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", pp. 110, 134.

54 Ermler, "*O Parizhskom sapozhnike*", *Ermler,* p. 110.
55 Ermler, "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", p. 131.
56 Babitsky says Ermler served as editor of *Proletarskoe kino* during this period; see Babitsky and Rimberg, *Soviet Film Industry,* p. 310; actually he served on its editorial board along with V.Pudovkin, V. Sutyrin, K.Iukov and N.Iakovlev. It seemes unlikely that his rôle was great; neither Ermler nor his biographers mention it.
57 Dwight MacDonald says on this subject: "Ermler studied at the Communist Academy for two years to prepare himself for this great task *[Counterplan]*"—an allegation which cannot be substantiated. See "The Soviet cinema, part 2", *Partisan Review,* vol. 5, no. 3 (August-September 1938), p. 38. For Ermler's side, see "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", p. 133.
58 *Puti kino,* p. 322.
59 On the making of *Counterplan,* see: Ermler, "Kak ia stal rezhisserom", pp. 133–4, and "*Vstrechnyi:* Iz dnevnika", *Ermler,* p. 121; and Yutkevich, "Iz vospominanii", *Ermler,* pp. 122–5.
60 Yutkevich, "Iz vospominanii", p. 125, and A.Macheret, "O razvlekatel'nosti, uspekhe u zritelei i nekotorykh drugikh veshchakh", *Kino,* no. 59 (1932).
61 Viktor Shklovskii, "Dve neudachi", *Kino,* no. 55 (1932) (the other failure was Dovzhenko's *Ivan*). For examples of the extensive coverage accorded the film, see *Kino,* nos 52 and 58 (1932).
62 L.Ginzburg, "Fil'm o liudiakh, stroiashchikh sotsializm", *Pravda,* 27 November 1932.
63 P.A.Bliakhin, "*Vstrechnyi*", *Izvestiia,* 18 November 1932.
64 See, e.g. *Korennye voprosy sovetskoi kinematografii: Vsesoiuznyi soveshchanie po tematicheskomu planirovaniiu khudozhestvennykh fil'm na 1934 g.* (Moscow: GUFK, 1933), p. 40, for remarks by Shumiatskii; and *Za bol'shoe kinoiskusstvo* (Moscow: Kinofotoidzat, 1935), p. 30 for remarks by Eisenstein, and p. 55 for those by Trauberg.
65 See Youngblood, *Soviet Cinema,* app. 2, for comparative figures on genres and a graph of the history of the *bytovoi* film, 1918–35.
66 The controversy over Rolan Bykov's *Scarecrow* in the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta, Pravda* and *Izvestiia* (1984–5) is a testament to the continuing vitality of the genre.
67 Nikitin goes on to say that Ermler despised such bombast and, bitter to the end, suggests that Ermler would have responded to his tribute with "a rather coarse witticism". See Nikitin, "Iz vospominanii kinoaktera", p. 111.

CHAPTER 4
Cinematic Abstraction as a Means of Conveying Ideological Messages in The Man with the Movie Camera

VLADA PETRIC

As a filmmaker who repeatedly advised his *kinoki* to "explore the economic structure of society… [in order] to understand the phenomena of life surrounding them",[1] and who insisted that "life-facts" be recorded with a critical, analytical eye, Vertov emphasized that in cinema "truth must be obtained by means of truth alone",[2] But, above all, he contended that "Film-Truth" must be "achieved by cinematic means",[3] through the use of the "Film-Eye" method—"the documentary cinematic decoding of the visible world as well as the world invisible to the unarmed [naked] human eye".[4]

The accomplishment of such a complex goal, that is, to expose Truth by genuinely cinematic means that would reflect the hidden socioeconomic contradictions of a given environment—particularly one whose political atmosphere was characterized by rigid party control and Stalinist threats—was doomed to failure. Yet Vertov succeeded in conveying his ideological views despite their being at odds with the official attitude. In his early newsreels Vertov presented direct criticism of specific political conditions through an intrepid disclosure of unpleasant "life-facts", which were often concealed by other media. In his masterpiece, *The Man with the Movie Camera,* however, he imparted the same ideological points by employing a sophisticated method of cinematic abstraction—namely, the dialectical integration of ideas, concepts and messages through visual signs.

Social criticism in *The Man with the Movie Camera* can be easily overlooked or misread; it is largely indirect and emerges retroactively, that is, as a metaphor at a distance. An example of this point is the juxtaposition throughout the film of different social strata through close-ups and medium shots of citizens in various situations and contexts. These images of Soviet people

"caught unawares" reflect contradictory conditions in a society within which, obviously, the idea of social equality is not put into practice. Workers are seen in situations that characterize the worst possible conditions in a capitalist country. Derelicts and bums wander through an urban milieu, while well-dressed ladies and gentlemen entertain themselves in ways that are no different from those attacked as "bourgeois" by the communist press. Relating these images to each other and, for that matter, to similar images in Vertov's other films, the viewers are prompted to ask how these inequities could still exist in a communist society.

Perhaps the most vociferous social criticism in *The Man with the Movie Camera* is made by the shot depicting elegant bourgeois ladies arriving at their apartment-building in a carriage, while a barefoot and shabbily dressed maid obediently waits on the street to carry their heavy suitcases on her shoulders. The characteristic reactions of the individuals in this shot reveal their different socioeconomic backgrounds and attitudes. The maid, who is earnestly involved in her work of carrying the burden, does not pay attention to the camera, while the well-dressed ladies either flirt with the camera or disdainfully pretend to be uninterested. To emphasize the spatial aspect of the situation, Mikhail Kaufman found the optimal position for his camera: he photographed the ladies sitting comfortably in the carriage from a high angle so that they appear in the foreground shot, while beneath them the barefoot maid moves deferentially in the background. An inquisitive boy, who is standing on the side, is positioned in the middle ground facing the camera, and the coachman, who places the suitcases on the maid's shoulders, fills the upper left foreground.

Although it is not explicitly stated whether the ladies belong to the old bourgeoisie or represent the "new class" emerging from the growing socialist bureaucracy, it is obvious that Vertov disapproves of one group of people exploiting another. This is emphasized in a humourous way by the next—and last—shot of the sequence, in which the Cameraman is shown walking along the street with the tripod and camera over his shoulder, un-equivocally allying himself with the barefoot maid carrying the suitcase.

There is good reason for such symbolic identification. In the early 1920s, most of the truly revolutionary Soviet artists were profoundly disappointed with the capitalist spirit of the New Economic Policy (NEP)[5] which perpetuated a bourgeois worldview.

Vertov, Kaufman, and Elizaveta Svilova responded to this consumer mentality by exposing "life-facts" from the NEP era while identifying themselves with ordinary citizens and workers who suffered because of the difficult economic situation. Vertov compares the Cameraman cranking his camera to the shoeshiner brushing shoes. He shows Kaufman reflected in the mirror on which a shoeshine sign is painted, visually elaborating his claim that the *kinoki* should be proud of equating themselves with the "shoemakers of cinema", rather than with the fictional movie directors whom Vertov labeled "film-mensheviks", "directors of enchantment", "priest-directors" and "grandiose directors".[6] Reacting against all of them, Vertov used "Film-Truth" and "Film-Eye" to side with ordinary people, as opposed to the old bourgeoisie or the "new class", which began to flourish during the NEP consumerism:

> NEP! Screw you, cafés and catafalques,
> Carriages full of candies and flowers!
> Children's cries—a knot in NEP's mouth!
> Take the sweets from thy mouth!
> Mouths are gaping through the window![7]

Who are the Soviet children with empty stomachs?

> An orphan sleeping on a garbage bin.
> An outcast youngster lying on a dirty street.
> A prostitute resting on a park bench.
> An invalid sitting in front of a pub.
> An undernourished child whose face looks older than his age.

At whom are these mouths gaping through a window? At a group of ladies being groomed in a beauty parlor. Or at a crowd drinking and enjoying itself in a congested tavern. Where is the tavern located? Significantly, the following sequence takes place in a workers' club dedicated to "V.I.Ulyanov-Lenin", where only a few individuals/workers—Vertov among them—are reading papers, and playing checkers and chess. An implied comparison is emphasized even more directly in the cross-cutting of shots depicting the process of splicing film and the acts of stitching and sewing with acts of applying lipstick, powder and fingernail

polish. When one relates these close-ups with the medium shots of a female worker cleaning railway tracks or throwing mud on a construction site, it becomes clear that the cinematic parallelism is meant to provide the basis for a metonymic comparison that contains subtle ideological implications and alludes to the social differences between the activities typical of the bourgeois environment and those of the working class.

Following his credo that the Truth and its real social meaning have to be expressed on the screen "by cinematic means", Vertov uses many different kinds of device, including camera movement, which creates great kinesthetic tension. The best example of this is the "Lenin's Club—Playing Games" sequence, which consists of five shots linked by invisible cuts. The camera glides in front of a religious store, tracks along a cobblestone street, tilts diagonally over the façades and church spires, to refocus on the main entrance of one church where Lenin's portrait is exhibited above the door. Then, with a swift pan, it finally focuses on another church entrance bearing the inscription "Lenin's Club". These five shots are perceived as a continuous and fluid camera movement within a unified space, which, through the relationship between the smooth cuts and the camera movement, provides a clear ideological message: on a cinematic level, the sensorial impact of the "swish" and "flick" pans converts the church environment into the workers' club, thus "sanctioning" the historical "life-fact" of the new social reality in which the religious store and church buildings are turned into socially utilitarian environments. Through the camera's fast panning of the sky and the buildings' façades, the transitions between the five shots are hardly perceptible, thereby stimulating ideological associations similar to the metaphors implied by authentic footage showing people demolishing churches at the beginning of *Enthusiasm*.[8]

A close examination of the structure of the "Lenin's Club" sequence confirms that its ideological implications result from the integration of cinematic devices and the representational content of the images. For example, the introductory hand-held close-up of blurred beer-bottles carried on a tray by an invisible waiter through a crowded beerhall, in contrast to the closing shot of checkers and chess figures miraculously jumping into place on the playing-boards, humorously alludes to the roguish chaos of the tavern as opposed to the orderliness of the workers' club. The two environments are connected by the camera's "intoxicated"

panning and tracking through space. Camera movement selects "life-facts" from each distinct situation, prompting the viewer to synthesize ideologically the images of drunken people in a beerhall, a religious store and church buildings, which are transformed into workers' clubs. These images are interrelated on a thematic level through cross-cutting, thus creating a new cinematic hole with a message that metaphorically merges the two locations—the beerhall and religious store—and two actions—the demystification of churches and formation of the workers' clubs—while suggesting that in the new society the pub and the church should be replaced by educational institutions and cultural clubs.

The parallelism is further examined by means of animation: beer-bottles have been "knocked down" by a female sharp-shooter, just as church icons have been replaced by portraits of Marx and Lenin after turning the houses of worship into workers' clubs. The sequence indicates a paradoxical situation with ironic overtones. While the pub is filled with numerous customers, inside the workers' club there are only a few people. Obviously, the masses do not readily change their cultural and spiritual habits despite the Revolution. Following the "Film-Truth" principle, Vertov refrains from misrepresenting such a reality, let alone falsely embellishing it to satisfy the official propaganda. Instead, he acknowledges "life-facts" as they appear in front of the camera at a given moment, and only in the process of editing does he add his own personal comments to them.

Some of Vertov's ideological allusions require that the viewers be familiar with contemporary circumstances. For example, the shots depicting three film posters, within the montage context, signify more than just a technical reference to the current movie repertory. One of the posters advertises a popular foreign film by depicting a young woman standing next to a man who holds his finger to his lips, as if warning her to keep silent. This poster is shown in different scales, four times throughout the first part of the film, compelling the viewer to wonder why so much attention is focused on it. Was Vertov so fascinated by this poster's graphic execution that he wanted his audience to see it in various contexts and from different angles? Or was the advertised film chosen for its content in order to discredit commercially oriented contemporary film production and distribution in the Soviet Union —a repertory that satisfied the taste of the "NEP audience" *(nepmanovskaia auditoriia)*?

The poster is first seen inserted between two close-ups of a sleeping young woman, thereby automatically suggesting: "Keep quiet—the woman is asleep." On a graphic level, its design is reminiscent of post-Revolutionary posters, which were used to warn Soviet citizens to remain vigilant and close-lipped in fighting the "enemies" of socialism. Later this association is expanded both ideologically and physically. It is not until the "Street Traffic" sequence that the entire poster is revealed, advertising the popular German film *The Awakening of a Woman,* or *The Awakened Sex,*[9] which was launched at that time as "an artistic drama of passionate love". Contemporary viewers, who were familiar with this type of film, were expected to make their own judgement of the sleeping young woman, who is obviously of bourgeois origin, and the bourgeois lady appearing in the German movie known for its trivial treatment of sex. The postponed revelation of the film's title on the poster, in conjunction with the sleeping young woman, also suggests a humorous *double entendre,* especially for those spectators who are familiar with the German movie and know what kind of "awakening" is implied.

In the second instance, the close-up of the movie poster follows the shot in which Kaufman, toting his camera, leaves an apartment-building, or the *kinoki's* workshop, gets into a car, and hurries off to work. Again the difference between romanticized staged films (photoplays) and documentary cinema (newsreels) is brought to the fore. Instead of going to a studio—where movies like *The Awakening of a Woman* are made—the cameraman veers into everyday life, just as Vertov urged his *kinoki* to do.[10]

In the third instance, a close-up of the same poster is exhibited at the entrance of a move-theater—clearly a direct allusion to the entertainment repertory promulgated by the NEP and the Leninist Proportion. The viewers are enlightened as to the poster's actual scale because they see it in relation to the Cameraman, passing from right to left, who, carrying the camera on his shoulder, now looks relatively small. The spatial relationship between the enormous advertisement and the tiny Cameraman running to his daily assignment suggests that the latter is engaged in shooting "Life-As-It-Is", as opposed to the staged "larger than life" situations exploited by entertainment movies. The graphic display implicit in the decorative style of the huge poster highlights the phenomenological disparity between the two worlds—one fabricated by a "Dream Factory", and the other reflecting the real

world in which the Cameraman focuses on significant "life-facts". The fictional cinema epitomized by the huge film poster and the factual newsreel represented by the tiny Cameraman are shown as opposite facets of the same environment in which *The Man with the Movie Camera* was made and shown. As Kaufman bustles in front of the fanciful poster without paying any attention to it, one realizes that, although antithetical, both the *kinoki* and the commercial world coexist indifferently, yet inevitably affecting each other.

The final appearance of the poster is a summation of all the contradictions. The poster, reflected in the revolving door of a movie-theater, looks even more paradigmatic of the world it represents. As the door begins to rotate, the reflection of the poster slowly exits to the left of the frame and is gradually replaced by that of the distant city moving from right to left. This optical mutation, the transformation of one image, the fictionalized world of a photoplay, into the other, "Life-As-It-Is", instantly suggests a triumph of Vertov's "Film-Truth" principle over entertainment cinema. The optical blending of different images reflected in the window hypostatizes the self-referential aspect of the film while confirming the illusory nature of cinematic projection and the ambiguity of human perception. The shot is composed of four visual phases in which one composition replaces the other: the movie poster; the skyline of the distant city; the Cameraman cranking his camera; and the doorframe obliterating the reflection. The fascinating metaphorical peak of the shot is reached when the mirror image of the Cameraman cranking his camera in front of the rotating glass gradually replaces the view of the city until the Cameraman himself is obliterated by the wooden frame of the door. This shot, by contrasting the reflection of a fictional movie poster with that of the outside world in which the Cameraman captures "Life-As-It-Is", metaphorically confirms the "life-fact" of the NEP era: the screening of an entertainment film supersedes the screening of a documentary film and newsreel. This was the fate of Vertov's own work in Soviet film distribution.

Contemporary viewers could easily make such a conceptual connection because the film genre advertised on the poster represented 95 percent of the Soviet film repertory,[11] and it exemplified the distributor's commercial credo: "The more conventional—the better" ("chem shablonnee tem luchshe").[12] Indeed, this was the attitude against which the *kinoki* struggled

continuously in order to establish a new revolutionary cinema and to abolish the production of bourgeois photoplays, which, according to Mayakovsky, "have nothing in common with contemporary Soviet life".[13]

Another movie poster appears in the second part of the film and depicts the recreation of citizens and their leisure-time. The film's title, *Green Manuela,* or *Where They Trade with Bodies and Souls,*[14] refers to another German "adventure spectacle" from the early 1920s. The first shot of the "Green Manuela" sequence is a long shot of several trees in a park. The subsequent shot, a long take, begins with a pan of the sky and then moves swiftly to the façade of a building on which the film poster is exhibited; the pan continues diagonally over the sky and across several trees to the roof of a movie-theater where a large horizontal panel, marked "Proletarian Movie Theater", is displayed; finally, the pan scans past several telegraph poles and rests upon a cluster of trees. The third shot is actually comprised, along the horizontal axis, of two images in which the Cameraman, kneeling beside his tripod, reloads his camera on the roof of a tall building towering over the city. The ensuing shot, a close-up of the sign "Beerhall/Bierhalle", introduces the "Beerhall" sequence. The message cannot be clearer: thanks to the NEP policy, trivial melodramas have invaded the "proletarian" movie-theater, just as pubs have been attracting citizens who can afford to buy booze. By preserving the spatial connection between the two phenomena—in a certain environment and at a given historical moment—the camera movement *(trajectoir)* makes an ideological statement that cannot be conveyed by a cut. Resolute diagonal upward panning to the "Proletarian Theater" functions as a kinesthetic metaphor for the *kinoki's* cry against bourgeois photoplays, the main target of Vertov's struggle against traditional staged cinema.

Finally, there is an insertion of a third movie poster, this time advertising a Soviet contemporary film, *The Sold Appetite,*[15] directed by Nikolai Okhlopkov in 1928, and based on a political pamphlet by Paul Lafargue. Promoted at the time as a "social satire on millions", this film was advertised by a poster depicting a group of elegant ladies and gentleman set against the background of a modern town. A medium shot of the poster is inserted within a segment depicting early traffic on Moscow streets. It is followed by the shot of a young woman—apparently a prostitute—sleeping on a park bench and a close-up of the camera lens. The

juxtaposition ideologically brings together certain "life-facts": everyday events (traffic, pedestrians) captured "unawares"; historical documents (film posters); social conditions (citizens sleeping on the streets); and the technological device (the emblem of "Film-Eye"). The phenomenological linkage between these images with *The Sold Appetite* poster is obviously intended to confront the viewer with the socioideological paradox of Soviet reality.

Through careful selection and interaction of "life-facts" as found in everyday life, Vertov and Svilova use the "Kuleshov effect"[16] in a highly sophisticated manner in order to achieve complex associations and ideological implications. In most sequences of *The Man with the Movie Camera,* they emerge not only from the juxtaposition of different images, but also from the ideological connotation intrinsic to the very execution of the shot. For example, the famous split-screen shot of the Bolshoi Theater is associative both in and of itself, that is, by its representation of a pre-Revolutionary architectual monument being "cut into halves", and by its position among other shots. The direct ideological implication emerges from the shot's composition and its optical distortion.

As the shot of the Bolshoi Theater already carries a particular cultural ideological connotation, when it is intercut between two close-ups of a large pendulum its ideological connotation becomes multifaceted: it links the past with the present. In the first closeup, the pendulum swings at normal speed, as if to denote the regular passage of time. After the split-screen shot of the building, the same pendulum—which is by a now a death-knell for the Bolshoi and all traditional art—begins to swing faster, metaphorically signifying the dynamism of the new society in which classical art, symbolized by the decorative Bolshoi architecture, appears anachronistic and doomed to be replaced, even abolished, by new forms of art and communication. A similar idea is conveyed in Vertov's *Enthusiasm* through the multiple exposure of the crucifix and church cupolas splitting apart in an optical distortion. Finally, after the splitting of the Bolshoi Theater has been completed, all shots of traffic and pedestrians are shown in accelerated motion, foreshadowing the end of the film and its most dynamic montage sequence in which Svilova's eyes and repeated brief shots of the swinging pendulum are interspersed among numerous close-ups of the film's beginning. Consequently, the notion of "temporal

progression", symbolizing the dynamism of the revolutionary era—as opposed to the stagnancy of bourgeois art—culminates in the film's final montage crescendo where representational shots merge into a semi-abstract kinesthetic vision characteristic of pure cinema.

In addition to particular shooting techniques—such as accelerated motion employed in sequences that depict the hectic traffic of an urban environment, with both forward and backward movement, or slow motion in numerous sports sequences to emphasize the visual beauty of human bodies in motion—Vertov introduces many different optical tricks done both in-camera and in the laboratory to convey the *kinoki's* critical attitude toward traditional art as well as toward the new socialist customs. After the shot of a couple signing marriage papers, there is inserted a brief shot of a traffic signal, suggesting that a new "road" is open to the married couple; after another couple signs divorce papers, there is a split-screen shot of the street traffic, creating a visual pun on the "instant divorce" that is easily obtainable in Soviet registration bureaus.

Perhaps the most kinesthetic way of transmitting an ideological message is through the subliminal montage Vertov and Svilova use in numerous sequences. Among them is the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence, intentionally placed after the sequences that depict various kinds of human labor, with particular emphasis on the working functions of the human hand. In this sequence, cinematic abstraction is achieved by the interrelationship — through subliminal montage—of shots depicting the Cameraman's body moving among the optically distorted wheels and gears rotating in various directions. The intervals are created by the conflict between different graphic shapes and directions of movement occurring in adjoining shots. The juxtaposed images include the three basic directions of motion—circular, vertical and, most frequently, horizontal—supported by the complementary movement of the tripod progressing along the diagonal of the frame. Certain shots of the machines are composed with the clear intention of underscoring their linear design (bars and shafts), others their circular construction (wheels and gears). In the climactic portion of the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence, eighty-nine shots with linear composition are progressively "bombarded" by sixty-three medium shots of the moving Cameraman with the tripod placed diagonally over his shoulder,

generating what may be termed a "subliminal propulsion" of movements and shapes, due to the cross-cutting between discordant mechanical locomotion and the Cameraman's smooth physical movement. The gears and wheels turn from left to right (clockwise), while the Cameraman and his tripod rotate and move diagonally from the upper right toward the lower left corner of the frame, forming a counterclockwise arc, thus creating a resplendent counterpoint of spiral movements that suffuse the frame with a kinesthetic syncopation.

The entire sequence consists of a total of 152 shots (fifty seconds), while its climactic segment contains fifty-five shots, thereby creating an intense kinesthetic pulsation due to the frequency of cuts. The first ten shots are relatively long—ranging from fifteen or sixteen frames to fifty-two and all the way up to 108 frames—representing various parts of machines, with an emphasis on the triangular rods moving up and down with great speed. Inserted among these images are three shots of a lateral view of the camera, with the Cameraman's hand cranking it. The next three shots are: the vertical composition of the factory chutes (fifteen frames); the triangular composition of the rods (two frames); and the lateral view of the Cameraman with tripod and camera over his shoulder (one frame). Then a strongly vertical composition reintroduces the dominant graphic pattern against which the diagonal composition of the Cameraman is juxtaposed. The climactic section of this sequence can be divided into three parts, based on the physical position of the Cameraman and the graphic design of machines filling the entire frame.

As the sequence progresses, the image of the Cameraman is overpowered quantitavely by the image of technology—namely, steam-valves—in a two-to-one ratio. The image of technology occupies twice as many frames as the image of the Cameraman. The visual and compositional balance is achieved on a purely photographic level: the shots of valves are photographed through diffusion, while the shots of the two prominently positioned vertical smokestacks, seen in the first part of the segment, are composed sharply against a dark background with pulsating bright spots.

The third part of the segment first alternates a three-frame shot of machine rods and gears moving up and down with a two-frame shot of the standing Cameraman. The world of machines is emphasized through various details: after ten close-ups of rods and

a gear, other elements of machinery gradually take over. Two of them are particularly notable: horizontally rotating spindles and a blurred spinning wheel. They are intercut with shots of the Cameraman at a rate of three frames (of the spindles and wheel) to two frames (of the Cameraman). After sixty-five shots, the Cameraman, who maintains a more or less stable diagonal position in the shot, begins to move slowly—at first counter-clockwise and then in various directions, sometimes jumping from one position to another. The second section of this third part contains twenty-three shots (from number 130 to 152) and brings the intervals' beats to the height of optical propulsion by maximally reducing the shot duration (one frame equals one shot).

As in the "Street and Eye" sequence, this segment of the film demonstrates Vertov's awareness of the fovea phenomenon.[17] The function of one-frame shots is to filter minimal visual data to the viewer's consciousness, thereby stimulating the audience on a sensory-motor level, through the pictorial design of the closeups whose kinesthetic interaction creates a subliminal vision of the subject, and at the same time generates the unique "phi-effect".[18] For example, the curved, spiral, diagonal and recurrent motions of the Cameraman's body are intended to incite the viewer's emotional identification with the "floating" Cameraman, as one can see in Figure 4.1 and the following shot-by-shot breakdown (CU=close-up; LAMS=low-angle medium shot):

(1)	CU	Rods and wheels spinning (one frame)
(2)	LAMS	Cameraman with goggles facing left (one frame)
(3)	CU	Spindles on a rotating wheel (one frame)
(4)	LAMS	Cameraman with goggles (one frame)
(5)	CU	Machine positioned diagonally (from lower right to upper left) with wheel turning in right foreground and valves rotating in upper left background (one frame)
(6)	LAMS	(double exposure) Cameraman with goggles (one frame)
(7)	CU	Blurred wheels spinning (one frame)
(8)	LAMS	(double exposure) Cameraman with goggles (two frames)
(9)	CU	Rods and wheels spinning (one frame)
(10)	CU	Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(11)	CU	Rods and wheels spinning (one frame)

(12) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(13) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(14) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(15) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(16) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(17) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(18) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(19) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(20) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(21) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)
(22) CU Blurred wheel spinning (one frame)
(23) CU Spindles on rotating wheel (one frame)

Through a close examination of these shots' graphic designs and, especially, the directions of movement between two adjacent images, one realizes that the kinesthetic energy in this segment is generated by the unique "optical explosion", which occurs at the junctures where the shots "touch" each other (cuts). Vertov considered this the most exciting effect one could achieve through the cinematic medium, and he named it the "theory of intervals". Numerous sequences in *The Man with the Movie Camera* exemplify this theory, while the "Cameraman and Machine" sequence with its collision of movements and conflicting graphic forms confirms that Vertov drew the idea for this theory from the suprematist method. This method created an "optical conflict" in painting through the juxtaposition of different graphic (mostly geometric) structures arranged on the canvas surface in such a way that each structure's position is placed at an antagonistic angle to the position of the surrounding structures.

For example, in Malevich's "Supremo No. 50" (1915), one long black and four red vertical rectangles are juxtaposed against another black thin line stretched diagonally across the canvas, with several shorter yellow, violet, and black triangles and squares distributed above and below the central line. Malevich explains that the goal of such a juxtaposition of various geometric structures is to trigger in the viewer a "a plastic feeling rendered on canvas, a feeling that can be carried into space" (1927). This statement is extremely reminiscent of Vertov's own idea of stimulating the viewer's sensory-motor centers by the "collision of intervals". Malevich's suprematist paintings are, indeed,

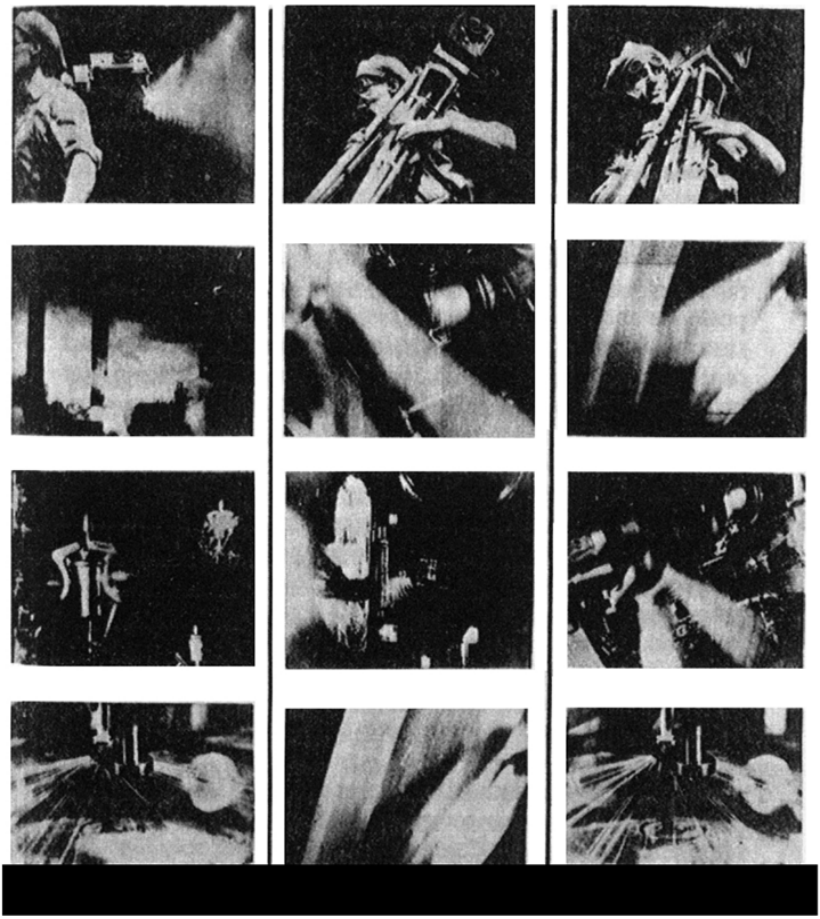

Figure 4.1

constructed with the evident intention to lead the observer's eyes in one particular direction which is—unexpectedly—cut off by the shapes, positions and directions established by the set of surrounding structures. The overall orchestration of these movements and conflicts supplies the canvas with enormous optical tension that is further enhanced by the different—again conflicting

or complementary—colors in the background. In Vertov's application of this suprematist method to cinema, the different tonalities of the graphic forms within the shot—that is, dark rods and wheels versus bright spindles and the Cameraman's body—correspond to the suprematist principle known as the "battle of colors", which is based on the hypothesis that each color posseses its own perceptual impact. In general, Vertov's "theory of intervals" is a prime example of an ingenious transposition of a method practiced in another medium (painting) to cinema, not by mimicking it mechanically, but rather by using it as a starting-point for developing a novel expressive means unique to the new medium.

The montage crescendo of the final part of the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence is composed of twenty-three one-frame alternating shots of the Cameraman and rotating spindles. The two-frame duration of the shot of the Cameraman with goggles (number 8) is arbitrary: it cannot be explained by any structural principle. There is no substitutional reason for this unexpected disruption of an otherwise consistent pattern of shot duration, unless the single two-frame shot is seen as a reinforcement of the fovea phenomenon, especially with regard to the Cameraman's vertical position versus the amorphous background formed by wheels and gears.

The emphasis on the graphic pattern of the movement within the shots creates a kinesthetic abstraction subliminally perceived by the viewer as a progressive spiral rotation. Thematically, this upward movement is associated with the representational appearance of the shots (the Cameraman, wheels, cylinders, spools, dynamos). Subliminally, the denotative meaning of the photographed subjects is linked with the kinesthetic experience of the physical transformations undergone by the Cameraman and tripod on the screen. Thus, when the Cameraman appears to float over the machines, the viewer's sensorial experience reaches a peak. As a result of this thematic-formal interaction, the vision of an elevated human body unified with the working machines can be interpreted as Vertov's celebration of the technological power employed by and unified with the workers.

The collision of two directions of movement in this sequence provides a unique kinesthetic experience stimulated by the intervals as constructed by Vertov and Svilova. The poetic overtones of the sequence are so captivating that the audience's

awareness of the illusion of double exposure is irrelevant. The rotating wheels form circular and elliptical patterns that merge with the vertical and diagonal formations. Edited on the principle of "intervals" (the conflict of different forms and movements occurring at the transition between the adjoining shots), this sequence turns into a dynamic graphic abstraction composed of various pictorial designs (Figure 4.2).

As one can discern from these diagrams, the segment's finale is suffused with circular-elliptical patterns, creating a surreal ambience in which the Cameraman appears to be flying among and over the machines. Gradually, the Cameraman's "flight" transforms his body's vertical position into a rotating circular structure complementary to the structure of the rotating machines. The abrupt "stop" to this kinesthetic choreography reflected in its lens is an image which represents the emblem of the "Film-Eye" method—"a creative unification of machine and human eye which is capable of generating a fresh perception of the world…[and] creating a new, ideal man",[19] The idea of the "Film-Eye" method is exemplified throughout the film in different contexts and through various visual symbols. The closing image of the film—functioning as an optical halt at the end of the extremely dynamic montage sequence dominated by numerous close-ups of Svilova's eyes—shows the lens with its iris gradually contracting, as the superimposed eye continues to stare at the viewer. Thus, the final message encapsulates the ideological connotation of the entire film: the naked human eye remains to observe the world, always ready to "arm" itself with the camera and capture "life unawares", disclosing "Life-As-It-Is".

An in-depth examination of the pictorial composition and rhythmic progression of the shots in the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence reveals the particular attention that Vertov and Svilova paid to the formal aspect of the shots. One should keep in mind that the technology of editing at the time was undeveloped and even primitive, particularly in the Soviet Union where a limited number of archaic editing-tables existed. However, Svilova managed to splice numerous one-or two-frame shots in order to achieve a subliminal propulsion on the screen, producing the illusion that the Cameraman is superimposed over the rotating machines. The photographic execution of these shots is equally sophisticated: the vertical position of Kaufman's body within the frame consistently matches the diagonal position of his

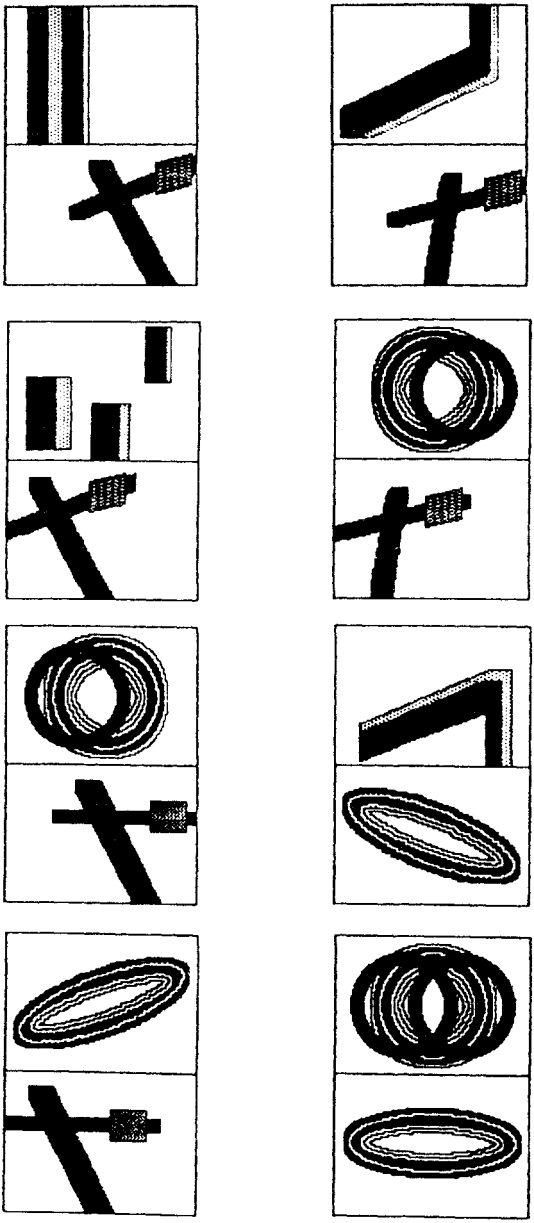

Figure 4.2

camera, so that the tripod appears as an extension of the Cameraman's body—a mechanical tool inseparable from the worker who uses it. The message: the Cameraman is a worker who also contributes to the building of socialism!

The first shot we see in this sequence is a lateral view of the Cameraman's left profile with the tripod extended behind his back in the center of the frame; he then appears on the left while a bright triangle of smoke from burning steel rises in the background. Wearing goggles like the other factory workers, the Cameraman moves further to the left, almost exiting the frame, as a sudden burst of white smoke appears in the upper right corner over the camera. Here, thirteen two-frame shots form a flickering effect, introducing a bright streak to the predominantly dark screen. Unlike the shots of machines, wheels and gears photographed in a more abstract fashion, the shots of the Cameraman never lose their representational configuration, thus implying that the Cameraman is an integral part of the technological environment, identified with the worker and an indispensable part of the industrial world. Overtaken by the mighty whirl of machines, the Cameraman appears free from the pressure of gravity as he floats in the factory setting, dancing and hovering with his camera as a balancing-pole. Gradually losing his earthbound identity, he becomes a truly omnipotent "cinematic magician", participating in a celebration of the industrial world.

Owing to the hypnotic effect of the stroboscopic pulsation, the Cameraman's figure appears flat, thereby intensifying the oneiric effect of the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence and contributing to its ideological signification. The dream-like setting within which Mikhail Kaufman is presented here can also be interpreted as a futuristic poetic vision of the ultimate unification of the workers and their means of production.[20] The fact that the Cameraman—who is wearing the proper protective gear and the worker's cap—is identified with the factory workers extends the cinematic metaphor in that it complies with Vertov's alliance of the *kinoki* with the workers and engineers trained to use modern technology (the camera) in order to contribute to the creation of a truly socialist country. In this, as in other sequences, the kinesthetic impact of the concentrated intervals is employed to substantiate—through cinematic abstraction—the filmmaker's ideological position in relation to technology, and to express his

enthusiasm for a world in which work would indeed become the true pleasure of human existence.

The last two shots of the "Cameraman and Machines" sequence are a close-up of a circular spindle, followed by a close-up of the camera lens reflecting the camera cranked by the Cameraman. Characteristically, instead of the superimposed eye, the lens is here associated with the working Cameraman, so that the idea of working/building overrides the idea of cinematic perception. The Cameraman actually observes himself as a worker while "throwing himself into the boisterous ocean of life…selecting and capturing events unawares…in order to make life's chaos clear".[21] As Vertov explained to his *kinoki:*

> The "Film-Eye" is challenging the visual presentation reality as seen by the human eye
>
> The "Film-Eye" proposes its own way of seeing, a new perception of life's instances.[22]

NOTES

"Cinematic Abstraction as a Means of Conveying Ideological Messages in *The Man with the Movie Camera* is published by permission of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Copyright© 1987by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

1 Vertov, "Osnovnoe 'kinoglaza'" (1924), in *Stat'i, dnevniki, zamysly [Articles, Diaries, Projects]* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966) pp. 81–2. Hereafter cited as *Articles*. The translations of the quotations in this article are mine.

2 Vertov, "Dnevniki", 7 September 1938, *Articles,* p. 219.

3 Vertov, "Kinopravda" (1934), *Articles,* p. 142.

4 Vertov, "Ot 'kinoglaza' do 'radioglaza'" (1929), *Articles,* p. 112.

5 NEP stands for New Economic Policy (Novaia ekonomskaia politika), defined and conceived by Lenin in his famous speech at the 10th Congress of the Communist Party, March 1921, encouraging Soviet citizens, particularly workers and peasants, to accept capitalist modes of production in order to improve the devastating conditions of the Soviet economy.

6 These terms are used by Vertov throughout his book: as, for example, "shoemaker of cinema" *(sapozhnik kinematografii),* p. 71; "film-mensheviks" *(kinomen'sheviki),* p. 79; "director-enchanter"

(volshebnik-rezhiser), p. 92; "director-priest" *(zhrets rezhiser),* p. 96; "grandiose directors" *(grandioznyekino-rezhisery),* p. 99.

7 Vertov, "Rty u vitrin", as cited by Lev Roshal' in *Dziga Vertov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1982). p. 35. Although not dated, the poem was probably written between 1932 and 1933, at the time when the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the Volga areas were struck by famine. During that period almost 6 million people, mostly peasants and their children, died—a fact which the official Soviet press has never fully admitted. There are many indications that it was man-made hunger, administered by Stalin to crush the Ukrainian "kulaks". The other possibility is that Vertov is referring in his poem to the natural famine of 1922 about which many writers have written extensively, including Mayakovsky, who dedicated his 1922 poem "Volga" to it.

8 The introductory sequence of *Enthusiasm* or *Symphony of the Don Basin* (*Entuziasmili Simfonia Donbassa,* 1930) includes documentary footage showing the revolutionary masses knocking down a cross from the steeple and taking out icons from the church. Historically, these documents precede the footage in *The Man with the Movie Camera* depicting the churches already "transformed" into workers' clubs.

9 *The A wakening of a Woman* or *The A wakened Sex (Probuzhdeniezhenschiny ili Probuzhdennyi pol)* are the Russian titles for the German film *Das Erwachsen des Weibes* (1927) directed by Fred Sauer.

10 Vertov, *"Chelovsk s kinoapparatom—Zritel'naia simfoniia"* (1929), *Articles,* p. 279.

11 See "Filmografiia amerikanskykh nemykh fil'mov byvshikh v sovetskom prokate", *Kino i vremia* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznyi gosudarstvennyi fond kinofil'mov ministerstva kul'tury SSSR, 1960), pp. 213–324; "Frantsuzskie nemye fil'my v sovetskom prokate", *Kinoi vremia* (Moscow: Gosfil'mfond, 1965), pp. 348–79, 380–476. Over all, the filmography of the foreign silent films distributed in the Soviet Union between 1922 and 1933 includes 956 American, 535 German and 202 French commercial titles.

12 Vertov, *"The Man with the Movie Camera"* (1928), *Articles,* p. 106.

13 Vladimir Mayakovsky, as cited in *Vstuplenniia na dispute opolitike Sovkino* (1927) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1954), p. 441. Mayakovsky was so extremely dissatisfied with the Soviet film repertory that in 1922 he published an epigram, "Kino i vino", in a magazine, poking fun at the state company Sovkino for producing films *(kino)* like wine *(vino).* The poem opens with the lines "Skazal/filozof iz Sovkino:/ 'Rodnye sestry/kino i vino'" ("Said the philosopher from Sovkino: 'Film and wine are true sisters' "): *Polnoe sobranie*

sochinenii, Vol. 9 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959), p. 64.

14 *Green Manuela* or *Where They Trade in Bodies and Souls (Zelenaia Manuela ili gde torguiut telom i dushoi)* are the Russian titles for the German film *Die Grune Manuela* (1923) directed by E.A.Dupont.

15 *The Sold Appetite (Prodannyi appetit),* produced by VUFKU (Odessa) in 1928 and directed by Nikolai Okhlopkov, was based on a satirical pamphlet, *Un Apétit vendy,* by Paul Lafargue. Some sequences of this dramatic film contain original archival footage of Lenin's funeral (24 January 1924) intercut within the main story of the film. The action is set in a "capitalist country", which is particularly emphasized by sets and costumes. A multi-millionaire suffers from a mysterious disease: his stomach cannot digest food. Doctors recommend that his stomach be replaced and try to find someone who is willing to sell his own. A poor bus-driver, pressed by his girlfriend, agrees to sell his stomach to the millionaire. The operation is performed, and the restomached millionaire begins to consume enormous quantities of food; at the same time, however, the bus-driver becomes weak, falls into a depression and attempts to commit suicide. His girlfriend attempts to revive his interest in life, and he slowly recovers. Soon he continues to drive his bus, but after several attacks of depression he drives into a wall on the street and kills himself; almost simultaneously, the millionaire dies of obesity in his fancy home. Aware of this story, the viewers of *The Man With the Movie Camera* could apparently draw parallel associations with regard to contemporary Soviet life during the NEP era.

16 The "Kuleshov Effect" is based on the montage principle, according to which the ultimate meaning of a shot is qualitatively changed by preceding and/or succeeding shots. For a full explanation of the principle, see Ronald Levaco (ed. and trans,), *Kuleshov on Film* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974), p. 200.

17 The "fovea phenomenon" is defined as "a sphere smaller than a pinhead near the center of the eye's retina which appears to be the major source of consciously induced visual information": Wilson Bryan Key, *Subliminal Seduction: Ad Media's Manipulation of a Not So Innocent America* (New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 51. In his book entitled *Subliminal Perception: The Nature of a* Controversy (London: McGraw-Hill, 1971), N.F.Dickson confirms that "there are enough specific studies which have successfully employed psychological concomitance of emotion as indicators of subliminal effect" (p. 166).

18 The "phi-effect" is determined by the stroboscopic (as well as flickering) nature of cinematic projection. If two different objects or graphic forms are projected alternately on the same screen, the

viewer will have the illusion that one form is transformed into another, i.e., that they exist simultaneously (which generates a different perceptual impact from mechanical superimposition). Correspondingly, if the image of the same object is projected alternately on different areas of the screen, the viewer will have the illusion that the object is jumping back and forth. The "phi-effect" is highly kinesthetic and, if appropriately used, can intensify the viewer's sensory-motor involvement in the event presented on the screen.

19 Vertov, "Kinoki. Perevorot" (1923), *Articles,* p. 55.

20 Like the Constructivists, the Futurist poets expressed great admiration for the technological age and workers' behavior in the industrial environment. Mayakovsky, for example, composed numerous "hymns" to factories and machines; his enthusiasm for mechanical constructions erupted in its full fervor during his 1925 visit to the United States where he wrote his ode to the Brooklyn Bridge, which (together with his apotheosis to the Eiffel Tower) best illustrates his futuristic preoccupation with technology:

> What pride
> I take
> in that steel of mile,
> and from it arose
> my living vision
> the struggle
> for construction
> instead of style,
> the stern calculation
> of steel
> precision.

(Translated by Herbert Marshall, *Mayakovsky* (London:Dennis Dobson, 1965),pp.337–8.)

21 Vertov, "Chelovek s kinoapparatom—zritel'naia simfoniia", p. 278–9.

22 Vertov, "Kinoki. Perevorot", p. 58.

CHAPTER 5
The Kinetic Icon and the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System

ANNETTE MICHELSON

The following introductory passage appears at the beginning of Panofsky's lectures on funerary art, published in 1964 as *Tomb Sculpture:*

> An art historian can approach the subject of these lectures only with the greatest trepidation. Trespassing upon the preserve of many adjacent disciplines (classical and oriental archeology, Egyptology, the history of religion and superstition, philosophy and several others), he has to rely largely on secondary sources and often finds himself confronted with a diversity of opinions, at times about crucial points which he, as a rank outsider, cannot presume to evaluate.... To make things worse there is hardly any sphere of human experience where rationally incompatible beliefs so easily coexist and where prelogical, one might also say metalogical, feelings so stubbornly survive in periods of advanced civilization as in our attitude towards the dead.[1]

In offering a reading of *Three Songs of Lenin,* that monument of cinematic hagiography, I must adopt a somewhat apologetic stance, and a sense of trepidation, as I work within the very young discipline of cinematic studies. For the fifteen or so years of accumulated serious scholarship are dependent on an even wider spectrum of established fields of inquiry, including art history, linguistics and psychoanalysis, and involve an area in which the prelogical irrationality of compatible beliefs with respect to death is compounded by the contradictions of the fetishism inscribed within the cinematic institution.

I shall begin with a double epigraph: the first one from the text of the anti-iconoclastic doctrine promulgated by the Orthodox

Council of AD 787: "An icon of Christ represents Him in His human nature; those who reject such icons reduce the mystery of the Incarnation to a phantom."

The second text, which has considerably greater currency within film studies, is from Barthes' *Camera Lucida:* "The life of someone whose existence has slightly preceded our own enfolds within its particularity the very tension of history, its share. History is hysterical; it is formed only under our gaze, and the condition of that gaze is our exclusion from history."[2]

Within Dziga Vertov's cinematic production, *Three Songs of Lenin* enjoys a greatly privileged status; it is, indeed, the only film of Vertov's to which immediate, unanimous and enduring approval was extended within the Soviet Union. Its wide distribution and prompt incorporation within the canon of officially endorsed film generated the publication in 1962, by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, of N.P.Abramov's slender illustrated monograph. It is the fact rather than the text of this publication that commands our interest, confirming our sense that the history of this film's reception is unique.

Responding in 1934 to the film's cordial reception, Vertov was, however, at pains to stress the continuity of this work with his previous production—a production contested at every point of Vertov's involvement in film theory and practice over the preceding decade. Thus he notes that "creating *kinopravda* about Lenin—even within the confines of a theme strictly limited by the assignment—required making use of all previous experience of kino-eye filmings, all acquired knowledge; it meant the registration and careful study of all our previous work on this theme".[3] He then proclaims that "the elimination of falsity, the achievement of that sincerity and clarity noted by critics in *Three Songs of Lenin* (and we note the prior left-handed salute of approbation inscribed in this acknowledgement) required exceptionally complex editing. In this respect the experience of *The Man with a Movie Camera, One-Sixth of the World, of Enthusiasm* and *The Eleventh Year* were of great help to our production group. These were, so to speak, 'films that beget films'."[4]

The entire production of the group of *kinoki,* organized and administered by Vertov as chairman of their executive Council of Three between 1924 and 1934 (?), was commissioned by specific agencies for specific ends. Thus, *Forward, Soviet!* (1925) had been commissioned by the Moscow Soviet as a demonstration of the

progress made during the immediately post-Revolutionary construction of the new administrative capital of the socialist state; *One-Sixth of the World* (1926) was commissioned by Gostorg, the Bureau of Foreign Trade; *The Eleventh Year* (1928) was a tenth-anniversary celebration of the advances in hydroelectric power; and *Enthusiasm* (1930), Vertov's first sound film and still the most advanced in its use of concrete sound, celebrated the Stakhanovite acceleration of mining and agriculture in the Don Basin. *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) stands alone as Vertov's wholly autonomous metacinematic celebration of filmmaking as a mode of production and, as I have argued elsewhere, a mode of epistemological inquiry.[5] Of *Three Songs of Lenin,* commissioned for the tenth anniversary of Lenin's death (and it was, of course, one of several such commissions), I shall attempt to locate its precise signification, its political function within the historical situation of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. That effort will engage a number of considerations, psychoanalytically grounded, across a variety of artistic and discursive practices.

While I shall be bracketing the extensive descriptive task entailed in this reading, we shall want to attend to some of the particulars of Vertov's own account of its production:

> Undiscovered and published shots of the living Lenin had to be found. This was done with the greatest patience and persistence by my assistant, Comrade Svilova [Vertov's editor and fellow-member, together with Boris Kaufman, of the Council of Three], who reported ten new film clippings of the living Lenin for the tenth anniversary of his death. For this purpose, Comrade Svilova studied over six hundred kilometers of positive and negative footage located in various cities of the Soviet Union.
>
> A search for documents on the Civil War had to be made, since our film *A History of the Civil War,* turned out to have been split up and sorted out under different titles in warehouses, and it was impossible to locate it whole anywhere.
>
> We had to transfer Lenin's actual voice [in the one extant recording] onto film. Shtro, the sound engineer [the author of the remarkable sound score for *Enthusiasm*], succeeded in doing this after a whole series of experiments.

> A great deal of work was involved in searching out and recording Turkish, Turkmen, and Uzbek folk songs about Lenin. Along with synchronous sound shooting, it was necessary to shoot a whole series of silent sequences in various parts of the Soviet Union, starting with the Kara-Kum desert and ending with the arrival of the Cheliuskin crew in Moscow.
>
> And all of that was done only as work preliminary to the editing, to gather the essential footage.
>
> The footage then was subjected to laboratory processing in order to improve the quality of the image and sound.[6]

Here, then, is a film which, in its combination of archival material and freshly filmed footage—the latter both silent and in synchronous sound—straddles the boundary of sound and silence. Its discourse is propelled by copious intertitling as well as by music and speech. Vertov tells us, in a text entitled "Without words":

> More than 10,000 words of song texts, remarks, monologues, speeches by Lenin and others were recorded on tape. After editing and the final trimming, about 1,300 words (1,070 in Russian and the rest in other languages) went into the film. Nevertheless, H.G.Wells declared: "Had not a single word been translated for me I should have understood the entire film from the first shot to the last. The thoughts and nuances of the film all reach me and act upon me without the help of words."[7]

As we have seen, Vertov makes extensive use of archival material documenting Lenin's political trajectory and his funeral. This material had been shot in the immediately post-Revolutionary period, between 1919 and 1924, by the working group Kinoki, headed by Vertov together with his brother Kaufman and Svilova. The film's governing trope establishes a tripartite structure, animated by the folk tradition of the female mourner, as three songs by the women of the Muslim and Ukrainian republics in tribute to their dead liberator, the leader and initiator of an internationally supported revolution within one country.

Three elements remain to be mentioned. The central panel of this triptych, with its funeral of Lenin, shot by Vertov and his co-workers in 1924, offers us a group portrait (composed according

to the prevailing canon of 1934) of the revolutionary generation: Lunacharsky, Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin, Krupskaya, Clara Zetkin and, of course, among others, Stalin. And in this section a series of elaborate variations is played upon that material through the deployment of optical devices specific to cinema: loop printing, superimposition, freeze-frame, stretch printing, slow motion.

Vertov is the master of these processes, and he formulated in a number of now celebrated texts the origins of his cinematic work within and through them. Allow me to specify somewhat their nature and their rôle in Vertov's production in general, for those to whom this early work may be unfamiliar, for they will be important to my later argument and reading.

> I remember my debut in cinema. It was quite odd. It involved not my filming but my jumping one-and-a-half stories from a summer house beside a grotto of no. 7 Maly Gnezdnikovsky Lane.
>
> The cameraman was ordered to record my jump in such a way that my entire fall, my facial expression, all my thoughts, etc., would be seen. I went up the grotto's edge, jumped off, gestured as with a veil, and went on.[8]

He then describes the results. What Dziga Vertov saw upon that recording was fear, indecision in approach, resolution growing, the jump undertaken in apprehension, the sense of being off-balance, the minute adjustments of the body to renewed contact, the shock of impact upon the ground, and a slight sense of chagrin. He saw, then, what he termed *kino-pravda,* truth revealed by the camera eye and inaccessible hitherto. Film thus appeared to him as the radically new and crucial instrument of inquiry and analysis. In this he was not alone. There is, among his contemporaries in the period following the world war (these include Elie Faure, Eisenstein, Walter Benjamin and Jean Epstein) a generally shared epistemological euphoria which animates the film theory and practice of that era. (I cite, as one example, Epstein's view: "Take a man accused of a crime, film him in slow motion, and you will see the truth revealed upon his face.")

But Epstein's concern lay deeper; he claimed that little or no attention had been paid to the many unique qualities film can give to the representation of things. Hardly anyone had realized that "the cinematic image carries a warning of something monstrous,

that it bears a subtle venom which could corrupt the entire rational order so painstakingly imagined in the destiny of the universe".

And the subversion of that rational order is seen as containing the development of science itself.

> Discovery always means learning that objects are not as we had believed them to be; to know more, one must first abandon the most evident certainties of established knowledge. Although not certain, it is not inconceivable that what appears to us as a strange perversity, a surprising noncomformity, as a transgression and a defect to the screen's animated images might service to advance another step into that terrible underside of things, terrifying even to Pasteur's pragmatism…. Now, the cinematograph seems to be a mysterious mechanism intended to assess the false accuracy of Zeno's argument about the arrow; it is intended for the analysis of the subtle metamorphosis of stasis into mobility, of emptiness into solid, of the continuous into the discontinuous, a transformation as stupefying as the generation of life from inanimate elements.[9]

Vertov's sense of the revelation of truth inscribed within his slow-motion leap across a void determines his choice of what were called the anomalies of cinematic process, synthesized in that *summa* of cinematic techniques and achievements of the silent era, *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Here Vertov spelled out most explicitly the strategies mobilized in the celebratory analysis of cinematic representation which had animated his theory and practice for an entire decade. To them we must add one, whose significance and significant absence from *Three Songs of Lenin* we will note: that of the reversal of motion deployed by Vertov since the time of his earliest feature (beginning, then, in the *Kino-Glaz,* 1925) in a manner unequalled. To those who may be unacquainted with the heady delights of the editing-table the sense of control of repetition, acceleration, deceleration, arrest in freeze-frame, release, and reversal of movement is inseparable from the thrill of power. Roland Barthes has remarked that history is divided in two, not by the invention of cinema, but by that of the still photograph; one wants to say, instead, that history has been divided many times, and that the advent of cinema represents one

of those deep divisions: the euphoria one feels at the editing-table is that of a sharpening cognitive focus and of a ludic sovereignty, grounded in the deep gratification of a fantasy of infantile omnipotence which is open to those who, since 1896, have played, as never before in the world's history, with the continuum of temporality and the logic of causality.

Vertov deployed these anomalies in the construction of a cinematic monument, doing so at a pace which is that of the funeral rite in all its somber decorum, performed to the incantations of the female mourners and the music of nineteenth-century romanticism: Chopin and Wagner. I shall claim, then, that *Three Songs of Lenin,* in its paean of praise to the Living Liberator, in its insistent deployment of the images of the quotidian—Lenin correcting a manuscript, greeting a delegation of workers, accepting a bouquet from children, strolling and chatting with Bonch-Bruevich in the Kremlin court (all these images have been catalogued, indexed and republished, frame by frame, together with dates and provenance in a widely distributed volume published by the Marx-Lenin Institute in 1972)—corresponds to the register and order of imagery, originating in the art of Byzantium, imported into Russia in the tenth century, traditional in the celebration of saints and martyrs, of Saviour and Paraclete. Their deployment, moreover, in a central panel, flanked by the tributes of mourning survivors, the women of the Socialist Republics, amplifies this notion. I am, in fact, tempted to claim that the register, order, and scale and function of *Three Songs of Lenin* make of it more than a kinetic icon; it is a veritable iconostasis.

Let us posit, to begin with, the simplest incontestable view that the icon in the Eastern Church is a representation of a sacred personage, and that the representation itself is regarded as participating in the sacred nature of its referent; the nature of that participation is still to be specified. The image is, however, according to Methodius, honored though not adored; it is venerated, not worshipped—a nice distinction. The icon, again in a provision formation, derives not all that distantly from the Egyptian portraits of the dead placed in mummy-cases so as to be visible from within the mummy-bands. The likeness, double, or Ka, took the place in the grave of a mystic and vivifying image; it articulated the link between departed soul and deserted body preserved in the form of the mummy. (And we now have Nina

Tumarkin's splendid—and hilarious—study of the establishment of the Lenin cult and the entire history of Lenin's mummification and its rôle in the formation of the cult.[10]

We might want to ask, at this point, "How does an icon differ from a portrait"? But we might first more properly ask, "How does it resemble a film?" and find part of the answer to the first question inscribed in the answer to the second. Icons, like films, require special care in preservation, frequent restoration and steady temperature. The Russian icon was generally designed for exhibition on a specific site, in church or home. Research and inquiry into the history of the icon are extremely recent, beginning only in the nineteenth century. And, although according to Kondakov the finest icons are those attributable to a single hand (we recognize the shadow of a *théorie de l'auteur*), production developed toward a division of labor such that by the seventeenth century the celebrated Simon Ushakov specialized in the painting of faces. By this time, too, the narrative icon has developed out of the earlier, simpler episodes and the portrait panel as a more elaborate narrative form.

More interesting, and more telling perhaps, than all of this is one of the icon's salient features: the inclusion of that known variously as the *ozhivka* (from *ozhivit',* "to enliven") or *dvigat'* ("to move") or *svetik* ("little gleam"); all refer to the glint in the pupil of the eye which confers lightand, through light, movement, and, through both of these, the semblance of life or presence upon the portrait within the icon. The formal qualities of icons involve, similarly, idealization of physical traits, solemnity, rhythmical repetition, the representation of the saint's or martyr's life in episodes, and the view of the saint in quotidian existence, together with friends, donors, children, worshippers, mourners, disciples. One should also emphasize the rôle of textual support, of inscription, title, nomenclature. Thus, *Our Lady of the Burning Bush, The Virgin Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way), Our Lady the Cloud of Light: Lenin the Icebreaker, Lenin Bringer of Light* (in that process of electrification which will complete and consummate the construction of socialism and which generates so many visual metaphors in Vertov's *œuvre*).

One wants, as well, to mention those icons which are holiest of all and closest in nature to a sacred relic: the acheiro-poietic, which are in Russian termed *nerukotvornyi,* not made by (human) hands, not painted, but allegedly created by contact with and emanation

from a sacred personage—rather like those crafted by the Pencil of Nature and later, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, animated in movement by the brothers Lumière. As we know, André Bazin constructed his cinematic ontology upon the faith in a special status of the *nerukotvornyi* image in a paradigmatic instance, the shroud of Turin.

Thus, we may speak of the transformation of Christian themes of martyr and saint, of Saviour and Paraclete at the heart of a Leninist iconography constructed across the Soviet culture generally, but most immediately and forcefully articulated in Vertov's textual system. Of Lenin as of Gregory the Great it is declared that his "universal benefits are proclaimed everywhere and forever—causing the dead man to live on earth". To Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's assistance, fell the task of searching out, collecting and preserving those fragments of film, those recordings of the living Lenin from all over the Soviet Union. Vertov makes quite clear, in yet another text in which he pays tribute to the great patience and persistence of Svilova in the presentation of this work, that "the image, 'Lenin is Springtime', traverses the entire film and develops parallel to other themes".[11] She is lauded, then, as one who collected relics of the living Lenin like Helena in search of the True Cross.

In the Orthodox Church the sanctuary (chancel), where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated, is divided from the rest of the interior (nave), where the congregation stands, by the iconostatis. This consists of several tiers of icons usually forming a solid wooden screen. The iconostasis is pierced by three doors. When opened, the large center door (the Royal Door)—penetrated only by priest and ruler—affords a view through to the altar. The doorway is closed by double gates, behind which hangs a curtain or veil.

The signification of each part of the Orthodox church building is derived from its architectural location and its function in the course of the liturgy. The interplay between the immaterial and the sensory worlds is denoted by the sanctuary and the nave. At the same time, both these parts constitute an indivisible whole in which the immaterial serves as an example to the sensory, reminding man of his original transgression. For Saint Simeon of Thessalonika, "the narthex corresponds to earth, the church to heaven, and the holy sanctuary to what is above heaven". Consequently, all the paintings in the church, especially those

constituting the iconostasis, are arranged according to this symbolism.

The sanctuary screen was originally brought to Russia from Byzantium. At first, directly above the Royal Door was an icon of the Saviour flanked by the Mother of God on the right side and Saint John the Baptist on the left side. These form the so-called Deesis. The Saviour and the Mother of God are seen as mediators between heaven and earth and thus occupy a central position in the iconostasis. Similarly, the iconostasis is located on the boundary-line between the human and the divine. It would then be —and indeed will be—the work of this project in its more complete form to pursue the structural analysis of the kinetic iconostasis as boundary, in its screening function, the homology proposed in relation to the architectural and pictorial models here invoked.

It is tempting to pursue this homology, but there is another line of inquiry generated by the particularly complex convergence of the iconic and the indexical within *Three Songs of Lenin* which I find somewhat more urgent—more exciting at any rate. It opens on to so large a cluster of problems that I can only indicate some possibilities for further illumination of the film we are considering. I return, then, to my provisional characterization of the icon as participating in some as yet unspecified manner in the sacred character of the personage depicted.

It is obvious that I have collapsed, as it were, two senses of the iconic into the world—that which refers to the category of sign which portrays or illustrates its referent and that which we know as the highly developed genre of Byzantine and Russian painting. But this Lenin film, composed of shots made during the lifetime of the Living Liberator (and the root *zhiv* carries the meanings of "alive", "lively", "living" and "animate"), this work which proclaims his life beyond the grave, answers, at the very least, to some of the formal and the thematic conventions of the *pictorial* tradition; its manner of portrayal and composition involves, as it were, a transvaluation of pictorial values into filmic ones; and surely, in the long sequence of the body lying in state, prior to the funeral, in the House of the Trade Unions, we recognize a Dormition (like that of the Virgin, whose sleep preceded her Ascension).

The notion of the icon as in some way participating in the sacred presence of the figured personage is grounded in Paul's view (1

Colossians, 15) that Christ is an image of God, and that he is also an emanation of God. One would, then, have to say that He is the acheiropoietic or *nerukotvornyi* icon *par excellence*. The earliest example in recorded history of such an icon made by direct emanation is the legendary contemporary portrait of Christ supposed to have been painted for Abgar IV, King of Osrhoene, found in Edessa, Mesopotamia, in 544 and taken in 944 to Constantinople. It was presumed to be a portrait made from the living model, because, unlike a Veronica's Veil, it had no crown of thorns. And the earliest image of the Virgin, the Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way), presumably painted by St Luke, had been blessed by the Virgin herself.[12] These earliest of icons bear the mark of contiguity, of emanation; they are indexical.

In the history of the Western Church, art tends, with a significant steadiness, in the direction of the illustrative function of the holy image, and Gregory the Great (600) saw images as writing for the illiterate. This great debate within the Eastern Church produced a split within theology between the primacy of manifestation and that of representation. The iconoclasts, banning images, nevertheless decorated their architecture with enormous splendor; iconoclasm was directed at the mediation of the image as impeding access to the Real Presence. Western art develops, then, toward a system of depictive representation, highly conventionalized and constructed, but the reality of manifest presence of the divine is seen by the Eastern Church as theoretically, spiritually prior to depiction. Ten centuries later, the photograph once again reopens the questions of the icon, of the image as both image and emanation, and it does so by offering once again the icon which is acheiropoietic, or *nerukotvornyi,* not made by hands, traced by light which Plotinus says gives life and color to all things. Modernist painting will, of course, produce a new iconoclasm through Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, anthroposophists all. Alone among them, Malevich will grapple with the problem of cinematic representation in a debate with Eisenstein upon which I have elsewhere touched.[13] The title of Malevich's text of 1925 is, by the way, an expression of the contempt for what he saw as a revival of a regressive system of representation: "And images triumph on the screen!"

What cannot be denied, however (and Malevich does not deny it; he merely eludes the problem), is that every still photograph is, as Roland Barthes declared, "a certificate of presence", the

ostensive declaration that "this has been". And, if the photograph does exist in a realm located somewhere between the relic and the fetish object, it derives strength from its relation to its referent. Epstein had, with his extraordinary acuity, seen the epistemological interest of the place of the still photograph in film (the French word for photography being *instantane*); he had seen that the still photograph cuts into time, causing a kind of gap, bringing it to an instant of arrest, and that cinema, grounded in the persistence of vision, hypostasizes our inability to think that gap in time.

If the still photograph is abstracted from referential time, it becomes, as Philippe Dubois has termed it in his extremely interesting study, *L'Acte photographique,* a kind of "thanatography".[14] One can then say that it inserts, within our experience of lived time, the extra temporality of death. And this gives to the freeze-frame and to other cinematic forms of temporal digression, as I have elsewhere suggested, their particular effect of power. Within the flow of cinematic representation, that semblance of temporality itself, we can insert that arrest which figures the perpetual freezing of the image as in a kind of posthumous life within the flow of the film. The image thus released from that flow, and from that of the narrative syntagma, attains extratemporality. And, if it has taken so long a time to produce an interesting theorization of the photographic, it may be that the West has been reluctant fully to confront its intimation of the thanatographic function, deferring it for a century and a half.

If we now recall the film text of *Three Songs of Lenin,* we can easily locate the moment, the sequence which most crucially epitomizes the mourning function of this work. But first I shall offer some more general considerations on the work—this work—of mourning.

For it is incumbent to pursue here the source of the funerary ritual in which is inscribed the rôle of the female mourner. For there is a sense in which, within the ethnic communities represented in the Lenin film, the work of mourning is women's work. And Vertov draws upon the rich tradition of the oral lament, which traverses the corpus of Russian literature and was, for his own generation, extended in the laments for Lenin written and published by Mayakovsky.

The funeral ceremony and its articulation in accompanying laments derive from those practices within the tribal order in which the sense of the dead—of the murdered father—is felt as a

potentially powerful threat, such that it behoves the mourner to seek protection through magic. The theater of mourning and of commemorative ritual are generated by that magical action. Although they, like most aspects of social life, are, with the gradual effacement of the tribal order, transformed and undergo a process of privatization, they still retain aspects of their origins, of the rites and customs characteristic of tribal structure. We find, by the way, a clear and vivid representation of this in Kalatazov's ethnographic masterwork *Salt for Svanetia* (1930), which incurred strong disapproval on the part of the regime for its sumptuous representation of such vestiges surviving within the Caucasus during the period of the first Five-Year Plan.

The elaborate funeral rites (laying out, washing, clothing of the body; provision of food and drink and other presumed amenities) and their prescribed sequence are to be seen as acts of propitiation —all informed, as Geza Roheim has pointed out, with that denial of genitality which is the price of the dead soul's accession to paradise or to immortality. Funeral and commemorative ceremonies thus anticipate the manner in which the survivors strive to honor and appease the dead, convinced of their invisible and conceivably punitive presence. (We must not forget that Lenin had been the victim of an aborted assassination attempt from which he emerged in a seriously weakened condition.)

The chants, lamentations, songs, weepings, wailings, cries and other expressions of grief were so directed. For funeral laments were integral to the Russian burial ceremony. Proficient criers, weepers, wailers, lamenters and chanters were generally familiar with the rank or order of the company, and its ceremony, for they were guided by well-established rules and traditions. As funerals were conducted with some strictness, a definite sequence of themes was observed, and members of the family were addressed and called upon in definite order to participate in the lamentation. In addition to the chants rendered by professional wailers, each in the name of a specific relation, chants were performed by each of the kinswomen, since for the past few centuries this has been exclusively a genre of women's poetry. It was a form of accomplishment expected of women, and a comparatively easy one, since in the composition of the funeral chant a large rôle was played by traditional devices, appeals and formulas, a store of which was inevitably lodged in the memory of everyone who lived in the even tenor of the patriarchal mode of

life.[15] We are dealing, then, with a highly coded form of literary expression.

Recent history records the achievement of the popular poetess, the celebrated wailer, Irina Andreevna Fedosova, who related to Barsov, a collector of folklore, more than thirty thousand lines of wedding, funeral and recruiting laments. Published in 1872, the first volume of Barsov's *Lamentations of the Northern Region* produced a deep impression upon its readers. Among these was Gorky, who described Fedosova in the sketch entitled "The Wailer" after witnessing her appearance at the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1896. She was then in her nineties.

> But wails—the wails of a Russian woman, weeping over her bitter fate—constantly burst forth from the dry lips of the poetess; they burst forth and they awaken in the soul such poignant anguish, such pain, so close to the heart is every note of these motifs, truly Russian, sparing in their delineation, not distinguished by the diversity of variations—no! But full of feeling, sincerity, power and of all that which is no more, which you do not find in the poetry of the art's practitioners and theoreticians, not in Figner and Merezhovsky, nor Fofanov nor Mikhailov, nor any of those people who utter sounds with no content. Fedosova was imbued with the Russian lament; for about seventy years she lived by it, chanting the woe of life in the old Russian songs…. A Russian song is Russian history, and the illiterate old woman, Fedosova, whose memory contains thirty thousand verses, understands this far better than many very literate people.[16]

Having now isolated two determinant components of this textual system—icon and funeral chant—I pass to an account of its function within the given historical moment of its production, 1934 within the Soviet Union. And the psychoanalytical theorization of mourning and its work enables us to grasp its political signification. I turn, naturally, to the ground-breaking text of Freud. "Mourning and Melancholia" (drafted in 1915, completed in 1917, first published in the *Zeitschrift,* vol. 1, 1916–18). Its moment of production is, then, that of the duration of the First World War, and it is worth noting the existence of another text of the same period. "Topics for the Times on War and Death"

(1915). I shall specify, in addition to the singular interest of that theorization of mourning and its work which followed in the ethnologically informed research of Geza Roheim, its extension within Kleinian theory as a basis for the establishment of the depressive position, and, as well, the extremely interesting, recent (and as yet untranslated) studies by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. I have in mind, most particularly, those included in *L'Écorce et le noyau* (Paris 1978).

Freud's central concern, however, in this original text was, of course, the nature of neurotic melancholia. He therefore begins by proposing "to try whether a comparison with the normal emotion of grief and its expression in mourning will not throw some light on the nature of melancholia", Mourning is thus the background, the point of departure for the analysis of melancholia.

> Although grief involves grave departure from the normal attitude of life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a morbid condition.... It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription in the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to its mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests....
>
> Now in what consists the work which mourning performs? ...The testing of reality having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object.... The task is now carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind.... It is worth noting that this pain seems natural to us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning—the absorbing work of mourning—is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.[17]

For Melanie Klein, every object-loss involves a sadistic triumph of a manic order, which is difficult to tolerate by the conscious subject. The refusal or the negation of that triumph blocks—either temporarily or definitively—the work of mourning. Guilt and remorse for aggressive fantasies explain the work of mourning. Any object-loss, according to Klein, reopens the original subject of object-loss, revivifying an archaic attitude or level of ego: the depressive position.

Let me now—in the summary fashion enjoined by the constrictions of this format—join to our reading of these theorizing texts that of Vertov's intertitles. I call your attention most particularly to those of the final, third song or chant or lament:

(72) THIRD SONG (hand-lettered)
(73) "In Moscow…"
(74) "Ah, in the great city of stone…"
(75) "On the square stands a 'tent'…"
(76) "The 'tent' where Lenin lies…"
(77) "Go in your grief to that 'tent'…"
(78) "Look at Lenin…and…"
(79) "Your sorrow will dissolve as in water…"
(80) "Your sorrow will scatter like leaves…"
(81) "Lenin can dissolve your grief…"
(82) "Lenin can give you courage…"
(83) Stalin, great pupil of the great Lenin, carries on the fight…
(84) To build a socialist land of mass luxury…
(85) Machinery is now the weapon…
(86) DNIEPROSTROI
(87) The world's largest hydro-electric dam…
(88) "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
(89) "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
(90) "OUR OIL!"
(91) "OUR COAL!"
(92) "OUR METAL!"
(93) "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
(94) "OUR MAGNITOGORSK…"
(95) "Our mighty Baltic-White Sea Canal…"

(96) "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
(97) The "Chelyuskin" heores have returned.
(98) (revolving speech repeated)
(99) Lenin, We go FORWARD!
(100) THE END.

By the conjunction of theoretical text and titles I want to signal the location of the precise signifying function of this film, the historicization process which transforms document into monument. The function of the monumental is not only to commemorate, but also definitively to inter and block the return of

the dead (the stone set over the grave to impede, as ever, the corpse's resurrection). *Three Songs of Lenin,* that commissioned film so warmly received within the Soviet Union, is, then, designed both to mark and to terminate a process; it is designed to accomplish the work of mourning for the Lost Leader, elevating him to the sublime inane (the appearance of Lenin, frequently enhaloed in soft focus, and in superimposition, establishes him in a space of transcendental irrationality). Further, Vertov' s deployment of the cinematic anomalies, the optical panoply of slow motion, of stretch printing, looping, the freeze-frame, reverse motion, originally constituted as an arsenal in the assault upon the conditions and ideology of cinematic representation (in that progress from the magical to the epistemological function) are now deployed as an admittedly powerful instrument in the working through, in the obsessive rehearsal of the past, in that labor of repetition, deceleration, distension, arrest, release and fixation which characterize the work of mourning; in the infinitely varied and deeply cathected image of the Founder and Liberator, the dead Father. And it is, moreover, in the film's instants of the freezing of the frame—that of Lenin and of the hurtling advance of the "train of history" in motion—that we feel, within the cinematic figuration of this work, the release of Lenin into the frozen atemporality of the still photograph, which figures the acknowledgement of the loved object as dead, and therefore, as Christian Metz has put it, "one who can be loved as dead".[18]

This marking of the mourning period and its closure, this translation of Lenin into the sublime inane, defines in fact the space in which the Beckoning Substitute is now installed — enthroned—as its successor. It is as though Vertov, in fulfilling his assignment (an anniversary film) has seized upon the occasion for the national rehearsal of the work of mourning in the resolution, the transcending of a depressive position, nationally conceived, for the recall, in narcissistic triumph, to the impending task, the present imperative: the construction under the Party Leader and Secretary-General of an industrial power and a military machine.

NOTES

"The Kinetic Icon and the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System" is published by permission of the

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1 Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture* (New York: Abrams, 1964), p. 9.
2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), p. 65.
3 Dziga Vertov, "I wish to share my experience" (1934), in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley, Calif./London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 120.
4 ibid., p. 122.
5 See my "The Man with the Movie Camera': From magician to epistemologist", *Artforum,* vol. 10, no. 7 (1972), pp. 60–72.
6 Vertov, "I wish to share my experience", pp. 120–1.
7 Dziga Vertov, "Without words", in *Kino-Eye,* p. 117.
8 Dziga Vertov, "*Three Songs of Lenin* and Kino-Eye", in Michelson, *Kino-Eye,* p. 123.
9 Jean Epstein, *Écrits sur le cinéma* (Paris: Seghers, 1973), pp. 257–63.
10 Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
11 Dziga Vertov, "My latest experiment", in *Kino-Eye,* p. 137.
12 For a discussion of the acheiropoietic image, I have relied in part upon Ernst Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West-Selected Studies,* ed. W.Eugene Kleinbauer (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1976).
13 See my "Reading Eisenstein reading *Capital* (part 2)", *October,* no. 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 82–9.
14 Philippe Dubois, *L'Acte photographique* (Paris/Brussels: Nathan et Labor, 1983).
15 See Geza Roheim, *Social Anthropology* (New York: International University Press, 1950).
16 Maksim Gorkii, "The wailer", *The Odessa News,* 14 June 1896.
17 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and melancholia", in *The Complete Psychological Works,* Standard Edition, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1900), pp. 243–58.
18 Christian Metz, "Photography and fetish", *October,* no. 34 (Fall 1985), p. 83.

CHAPTER 6
Mr Kuleshov in the Land of the Modernists

VANCE KEPLEY, Jr

It is an invigorating paradox of film history that advances in research typically produce uncertainty rather than clarity, argument rather than consensus. As our received wisdoms fall prey to revisionist probings, as tidy linear models of film history give way to accounts which stress nuance and contradiction, we are reminded of the overdetermined historical causation.

There was a time, for example, when Western film historians could confidently encapsulate the Soviet montage cinema of the 1920s. The major Soviet theorist-directors—Eisenstein, Vertov, Pudovkin and Kuleshov—were pressed together into a monolithic model of Soviet montage, their individual contributions reduced to a uniform obsession with editing to the exclusion of all else. And it was not necessary to search long or hard for the source of Soviet montage cinema; look no further than D.W.Griffith.[1]

These handy generalizations passed from currency, and more complex, though hardly sacred, versions emerged. We currently acknowledge a variety of both cinematic and extracinematic influences on Soviet montage cinema, noting that preexisting styles of Western film as well as indigenous movements in Russian arts and letters fed into the montage tradition.[2] And, although we can still feel secure in speaking of a community of montage director-theorists, we now recognize vital differences among them; we might even find the debates between, say, Eisenstein and Vertov as edifying as their common claims.[3] Yet another measure of nuance, and perhaps contradiction, can be added to this revised account by reexamining Kuleshov's contribution to Soviet film theory of the 1920s. Such an effort must address at least two related questions: What were the principal sources of his early theory, and how did he attempt to synthesize them into a single theoretical program? The explanation enjoying recent favor holds that Kuleshov borrowed

the practices of what has subsequently become known as the classical Hollywood cinema, with its emphasis on legible narrative. Fair enough. But this tie to the classical style has given rise to a depiction of Kuleshov as the most aesthetically conservative of the major proponents of montage in a differentiation which places Kuleshov and Pudovkin in a supposed right wing of conventional narrative, while Vertov occupies a left wing of modernist experimentation with Eisenstein apparently residing in some middle chamber.[4] Right/left and conventional/modernist splits help very little in understanding the distinct nature of Kuleshov's project. If he looked to the conventions of Hollywood commercial cinema, he did so out of self-consciously modernist motives. If he raided capitalist cinema for models, he was also selecting out properties that he could apply to Soviet definitions of modernity in the arts. Whatever his debt to the Americans, his ideas also conformed to the program of the Russian avant-garde, specifically to what Ronald Hunt has called the Constructivist ethos.[5] In Kuleshov's theory, the classical Hollywood tradition would be mediated through the Soviet experience, incorporated into a Soviet context.

Any consideration of Kuleshov's aesthetic debts does well to begin with the historical conditions of influence. The circumstances that put Kuleshov in touch with both Hollywood cinema and Russian Constructivism represented the formative preconditions of Kuleshov's early theory.

I have tried to propose elsewhere on this matter that the activities of the Kuleshov workshop in the early and middle 1920s proved seminal for Kuleshov's early theory.[6] The experience culminated with the writing of the central text of that theory, *Art of Cinema (Iskusstvo kino),* a monograph that was substantially written during the middle 1920s although it did not see print until 1929.[7] Thus, Kuleshov's main theoretical statement was taking shape when he was in a strategic position to be exposed to American films, prominent in the Soviet exhibition market beginning in 1922, and to Russian Constructivism, a movement in ascendancy after about 1921.

This is not necessarily to insist that Kuleshov merely responded to current fashion. Rather, these circumstances allowed him to refine some of his preexisting interests which date from the late 1910s. Kuleshov's fascination with the utility of editing can be traced to his earliest essays in 1917 and to his work on *The Project*

of Engineer Prite (1918). In addition, Kuleshov worked in the Cinema Committee's reediting section in 1918, altering imports and pre-Revolutionary films for Soviet distribution—an experience that would have confirmed for him the power of editing. Kuleshov has even suggested that his first explorations of what eventually became known as the Kuleshov effect date from that phase in his career.[8]

Nevertheless, such ideas clearly developed and matured in the early 1920s, and Constructivisim helped form the context for that process. The Constructivist ethos, as the phrase might suggest, covered a range of artistic ambitions that cut across several media; but in all its manifestations it was identified with the modern experience. The ethos typically dismissed the received view of the artist as visionary, substituting a notion of the artist as engineer. "Art is finished!" Aleksei Can hyperbolized in 1922. "It has no place in the human labor apparatus. Labor, technology, organization!"[9], And, as Gan's industrial analogies indicate, Constructivism hailed the process of industrialization.

If the artist was to be an engineer, organizing raw materials into a workable whole, the art work itself was to take on the characteristics of a machine—practical, efficient, utilitarian. The art work's function—and the emphasis was decidedly on the functional—was to alter public consciousness, to help prepare the Soviet population for the machine age. Part of this "*rapprochement* [between] the 'cultures' of art and industry", to use Christina Lodder's phrase,[10] meant that the art work would honor machinery, not simply in the work's ideology but in its structure. The parts of the art work would be combined with mathematical care, with the artistic equivalent of precision engineering.

The ambition to evoke and advance extended well beyond the traditional media of painting and sculpture to encompass cultural products ranging from clothing to furniture design. Constructivism was noted for "the universality of its aspiration",[11] and one form that seemed especially germane was film, a medium born of the Industrial Revolution. Cinema epitomized in its technical base a machine efficiency, and in its aesthetic a modern dynamic. 'The cinema is the aggregate of an optical and mechanical apparatus," Gan asserted. "The cinema shows on the screen a sequence of photographic stills, i.e., movement."[12] And, while cinema fascinated Constructivists in the first instance because of its affinity

with modernity, it was singled out for special attention by the Soviet leadership as a medium ideally suited to carry the message of modernization to the Soviet population. To Lenin, for example, cinema's links with technology qualified it to help instill a regard for Taylorist efficiency in Soviet workers.[13]

Such sentiments enjoyed greatest vogue in the Moscow of the 1920s when Kuleshov was working with his students in a sustained investigation of cinema's characteristics. He subscribed fully to the mandate that Soviet film should educate the masses to the benefits of industrialization, and from there it was a small step to the Constructivist position that the art that promoted the machine must resemble the machine. And, while Kuleshov occasionally proved loath to admit specific debts to Constructionism,[14] he enjoyed contact with major figures of the movement. Meyerhold's work was especially proximate. In 1922, Kuleshov's class conducted lessons in the same building as Meyerhold's theatrical group, and the two collectives sometimes combined classes. Some veterans of Meyerholdian theater, including Meyerhold's daughter, even signed on as regulars in the Kuleshov workshop.[15]

In addition to such direct contact, Kuleshov's investigations of cinema often followed Constructivist precedents. If Kuleshov and his associates could reedit old film to generate fresh associations, Tatlin could cut a reproduction of a Rembrandt painting into geometric shapes, remount the pieces on a board, and claim to have created a distinct work of art, with its values emerging from the combination of shapes and colours.[16] And Kuleshov's celebrated Film Institute experiments, designed to test empirically the effects of certain filmic devices on spectators, followed close on the heels of Kandinsky's efforts at the Institute of Artistic Culture to establish a science of artistic effects. Kandinsky used his students as subjects in laboratory-like research on the imapct of color, shape and the like—a procedure that anticipated Kuleshov's editing exercises.[17]

Most compelling, perhaps, for Kuleshov was the Constructivist argument that a machine aesthetic promoted a modern sensibility, and he set out to explore the presumed affinity between cinema and modernity. He endorsed the Soviet proposition that "a good piece of film educates the viewer". That educational function, however, resided not simply in the film's ideology, but in its form: "If we take a film perfectly well worked out ideologically and produce it poorly from the standpoint of form, despite ideological

skill, it will turn out to be a counterrevolutionary film."[18] A film must *manifest* efficiency in order to *advocate* efficiency.

The constructivist ethos could hardly have been more specifically applied, and the process of its application took Kuleshov to the Hollywood cinema. American industry's mass production provided the most convenient model for the Soviet ideal of economic development, and Kuleshov did not hesitate to link the dynamic style of American films to the energy of the American industrial economy. Such films inculcated "boldness and energy" in the population, he asserted, and he envisioned such values transferring to the Soviet Union where they would prove "indispensable to revolutionary struggle, to revolution".[19]

He claimed to base his association of American filmmaking with social dynamism on empirical observation. American and European films dominated the Russian market in the early and middle 1920s while the Soviet film industry struggled to rebuild.[20] The situation familiarized Kuleshov and his students with both state-of-the-art American filmmaking and the Soviet popular response to it. In visits to commercial cinemas Kuleshov and his protéges watched audiences as carefully as they did films. They noted that American movies generated the most pronounced emotional responses from spectators. Hollywood adventure films and slapstick comedies, characterized by accelerated action and rapid editing, presented an invigorating alternative to the staid literary adaptations and drawing-room dramas of Russian pre-Revolutionary cinema.[21] Kuleshov came to prefer the lean style of the imports to bloated Russian productions which Kuleshov dismissed with the term Khanzhonkovism, a pejorative reference to the pre-Revolutionary Russian studio.[22] To Kuleshov, the very act of generating energy, a characteristic of American film, served the cause of social progress.

Not only did American films foreground action, but American film style, the classical Hollywood style—to use more recent parlance—also epitomized efficiency, in this case an efficiency of filmic discourse. The canons of classical Hollywood style which would have prompted Kuleshov's enthusiasm are familiar enough today: a clear, economical linear narrative; the careful articulation of time and space through such devices as matches-on-action and eyeline matches; and the organization of the space of a scene around the 180-degree axis.[23] Such devices, as we know, functioned to reduce any threat of spectator disorientation. All this

fit Kuleshov's preconception that "the material of the cinema must be extremely simple and organized" in order to assure the spectator's involvement in the film.[24]

It is also worth noting, in the interest of establishing the historical context of Kuleshov' s theory, that the classical Hollywood style was fully formed by the time Kuleshov took up serious theoretical inquiry. In fact the stylistic system dates from about 1917 and remained little changed through the 1920s.[25] The lion's share of the films to which Kuleshov would have been exposed as he followed the fate of American imports would have fit the classical model.

For Kuleshov, then, Hollywood provided the progressive alternative to an anachronistic tradition of Russian film drama, to benighted Khanzhonkovism. What is more, the Hollywood style provided the most promising cinematic contribution to the Constructivist program. If the question of how Kuleshov came to his sources is a question of history, his response to those sources takes us to the realm of theory.

Kuleshov translated his concern for efficiency into a theoretical system that argued for the director's unfailing control over the materials of the cinema, and his system was to be commensurate with the industrial ideal. The components of a film were to be designed as minimal units of meaning which achieve nothing in isolation and everything in combination. This is a literal application of the notion of *konstruktsiia* (construction), the bedrock of the Constructivist ethos. It also harkens up the industrial analogy since machine parts operate only in engagement with other parts: a gear will not function until it comes in contact with another specifically meshed gear. In a sense, Kuleshov looked to a cinema of interchangeable and complementary parts, and those parts would be tooled to severe tolerance.

Editing emerged as the obvious opportunity for such mechanical control, and American continuity editing anticipated Kuleshov's ambition. The continuity practice of organizing a scene around a pattern of establishing shot, shot/reverse shot, reestablishing shot already suggested a regard for standardized units. And this system of editing, which led a viewer through a scene point by point, promised a measure of control over spectator attention that would not obtain in scenes filmed in long shots and continuous takes, a practice that Kuleshov associated with pre-Revolutionary Russian cinema. The Americans, who according to Kuleshov were "so

strong in standardized merchandise",[26] offered something approximating to quality control in editing procedures.

Kuleshov even presumed to do some product-testing when he undertook his editing experiments with the aid of his students. At least two of the several experiments that he and his associates have described deserve special attention for the debt they reveal to the classical system.[27] The experiment that Kuleshov designated "With Mozhukhin", a series of shots associating close-ups of Mozhukhin with separate objects, confirmed the efficacy of a standard continuity device, the eyeline match. Not only did subjects link emotions with the items shown—a bowl of soup evoking hunger—but that association derived for the assumption that Mozhukhin was looking at the object. The "Fabricated Landscape" exercise, in which landmarks ranging from the White House to the Moscow river were intercut with the continuous actions of two figures to create the illusion of a single locale, apparently exploited such devices as eyeline matches, matches on action, and the directional continuity of 180-degree editing. These experiments, appropriated by so many film historians for so many purposes,[28] in fact betray Kuleshov's appropriation of classical continuity.

The experiments also served to reinforce Kuleshov's presumption that meaning emerged in the combination of shots more than in the intrinsic characteristics of given shots. Cinema's greatest power resided, not in "the content of certain shots, but [in] the organization of those shots among themselves, their combination and construction, that is, the interrelationship of shots, the replacement of one shot by another".[29]

This contention certainly calls up the mystique of *konstruktsiia,* the calculated assemblage of existing materials, that informed the Constructivist ethos. The individual components of a Constructivist work would retain specific textures *(faktura),* but the value of the overall work would emerge most forcefully from the combination of those components. The work was finally and most emphatically a construction.[30]

This conceit informed, for example, Rodchenko's several *Spatial Constructions* of 1919–21. These sculptures were built entirely from uniform wooden segments cut to standardized dimensions for use in industry—the Soviet equivalent of two-by-four and four-by-four lumber units.[31] The distinctive value of a given sculpture could reside only in the combination of parts since the parts themselves would have been indistinguishable from one another. In

addition, by selecting lumber in standardized segments, Rodchenko denied the pieces the autonomy of natural objects; the wood had been, as it were, robbed of any association with the natural realm (trees) and subordinated to human design (industry).

Kuleshov achieved a similar effect when he inserted found footage into his editing experiments. He diminished the image's claim to autonomy by diluting its original association with the object it represented. The image's new relationship with contiguous images in an editing sequence displaced its association with its original referent. Kuleshov's shot of the White House in his "Fabricated Landscape" sequence no longer referred innocently to a building in Washington, but to a building that existed in a fictional landscape in the minidiegesis of the sequence.

Perhaps the ultimate test of the power of *konstruktsiia* resided in the use of newsreel footage for fictional narratives. Newsreel footage should, we might presume, retain a secure unimpeachable link with its referent, documenting as it does real objects and events. Kuleshov first tested this presumption in his 1920 film *On the Red Front*. He recorded documentary footage of actual battles in the Soviet Civil War and later fashioned a fictional narrative about the conflict. He then used continuity devices to weave his fictional characters into battles that had been fought months earlier.[32]

The usurpation of documentary footage by narrative constructions is also evident at the end of Kuleshov's feature *The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks* (1924). The film was made by the Kuleshov collective during the formative period of Kuleshov's theory, and, by Kuleshov's admission, it represented a vehicle for his favored devices. As such, it can serve to illustrate in tangible form some of Kuleshov's theoretical precepts. The case in point comes near the film's end when the title character is taken on a tour of Moscow in order to disabuse him of the mistaken impressions of the Soviet Union he received on his earlier extraordinary adventures. At one point a Soviet guide directs Mr West's attention off-screen. Kuleshov there inserted documentary footage of a Red Army parade in what resembles a borrowing from a stock shot library. In this case, the documentary footage has been coopted by an eyeline match and thereby incorporated into a fictional world. The real Red Army, in this context, was reduced to the object of a filmic glance by a purely fictional Mr West.

In practice of subordinating the image to the needs of a narrative, Kuleshov had, in effect, to regulate the photographic image, reduce the shots of a film to simple units that would be subject to interchange in the editing process. This exigency led Kuleshov to search for an equivalent for the shot in written language, a system already based on repeatable units. But here he stumbled, first referring to the shot as a letter of the alphabet and then qualifying his analogy by invoking Chinese ideograms.[33] Perhaps his hesitation can prove enlightening because it points up the difficulty of treating the photographic image as a minimal unit of meaning. Later photographic theorists including Bazin and Barthes have reminded us that the photographic image enjoys a certain independence from human control by virtue of its "natural" means of production and by virtue of its uncoded analogic message.[34] Kuleshov had to confront the status of the photographic image as a perfect intractable analogy to reality if he was to make it serve his Constructivist ambition. His answer was through control of the *mise-en-scène* of the individual shot. Directors must carefully control what went in front of the camera. The image would then become the analogy, not of unfettered reality, but of a human construct, of an artificially created scene.

In indicating how to effect that control, Kuleshov applied rules of simplicity and legibility, just as he had with editing. The director's task was to strip away excess detail that might detract the spectator's attention from the key narrative function of the shot. Here Kuleshov could look again to the classical Hollywood model with its conventions of centered and/or balanced framing, and the frontal positioning of actors.[35] Indeed, he noted with admiration the simplified, ordered compositions of American films, but he went beyond these practices to advance quite rigid formulas of *mise-en-scène*. Whereas the Hollywood system "personalized space", making it primarily the venue of character-centered drama, Kuleshov was prepared to go so far as eliminating any spatial context, setting actors off against completely black backgrounds if necessary. This tactic was used periodically in *Mr West* to focus spectator attention exclusively on character behavior: "We wanted the action…to be most lucid, in relief, and the background to be shaded, to serve only a subsidiary rôle."[36]

But characters must also interact with a physical environment—a fact that required the creation of surrounding décors. On this issue, Kuleshov developed a purely geometrical formula for the

space of a shot, an idea consistent with the Constructivist ethos. Film space, Kuleshov submitted, need not be conceived as a natural continuum, but as the aggregate of smaller, finite spaces, each of which would be defined and measured geometrically. The director could then position objects and characters in the shot with a precision that only geometry allowed. Kuleshov described the film frame as a grid, consisting of vertical and horizontal axes running at regular intervals parallel to the borders of the frame. He then argued that compositions should obey the design of the grid with a few strong vertical, horizontal or diagonal lines dominating the image. Thus could a director avoid random, unbalanced and, in Kuleshov's view, confusing compositions. Movement within the frame would prove more dramatic if it followed the grid-lines as well.[37]

These restrictive covenants in Kuleshov's theory would clearly threaten to curtail in an artificial manner a director's choices for staging action, and it led to Kuleshov's rather notorious edict that filmmakers should prefer a carpentered world for settings (bridges, buildings, etc.) to natural landscapes where forms would prove less geometrically predictable.[38] In his own filmmaking Kuleshov was often hard pressed to practice this particular preaching. One can, however, find it in evidence in certain scenes of *Mr West*. An example might be Jeddy's daring trip between two tall buildings along a wire stretching between the two structures. The wire defines a horizontal which is framed by the vertical lines of the two buildings. Kuleshov would doubtless make the case that the dramatic effect of the action derived not simply from the actor's acrobatics, but from the geometric design of the shot—a horizontal set off against two graphically powerful verticals. Kuleshov's geometrical conception of space was not limited to the two dimensions of the movie screen. He extended his system to the calculation of compositions into the depth of the camera's view-field. He described that field as a tipped pyramid, the apex of which resided in the center of the camera lens. His grid could then be extended through the length of the pyramid, with the lines converging at the apex. This design allowed directors to place actors and objects "into…basic quadrangles which provide an outline for movement with such precision that they occupy very clear, close, and easily decipherable positions in terms of the rectangular screen".[39] For example, placing an object in the extreme foreground, near the apex of Kuleshov's imaginary

pyramid, would exaggerate the object's relative size, and the degree of exaggeration would be subject to perfect reckoning as the product of an exponential. The director could then calculate mathematically the relative consequences of placing objects in the foreground, middle ground or background. Kuleshov tried out the equation in an action scene in *Mr West* wherein he placed a jug precariously on a pedestal in the foreground while a knock-down-drag-out fight ensued in the background. The outsized jug dominates the *mise-en-scene,* threatening to detract from the fight which takes place behind it—a set-up which might seem to violate Kuleshov's admonition against letting items of the décor compete with character action. In this case, however, it becomes clear that Kuleshov placed the jug in the foreground for a reason; its function is to crash into pieces at the height of the battle, which crash dutifully takes place. Kuleshov's calculation of the effect of the camera's perspective determines the jug's prominence, which, in turn, governs the dramatic effect of the crash.

Kuleshov, then, subdivided even the photographic image. The image was not, in Kuleshov's system, the continuous perfect analogy of reality that Barthes described. Rather, it was a construction, built up from discrete measured details. The image was neither "natural" nor was it finally the minimal unit of film language. It had to be built, and the blueprints for that process of building obeyed laws of geometry, all of which would doubtless have impressed Kuleshov's Constructivist contemporaries.

Kuleshov's faith that any whole could be broken into constituent parts carried over to film acting. He appealed to traditions of mechanical acting which stressed the actor's physical attributes rather than his/her psychological interpretation of a character. The actor's body became an instrument that was to be utilized according to fully rationalized procedures which took "into account the entire mechanism of work, the mechanics of movement".[40]

Kuleshov's machine metaphors reveal yet another debt to Constructivism, in this case to Meyerholdian biomechanics. Meyerhold had long militated that the actor should be treated as something of a malleable object, and he required that an actor "strive for complete control over his body".[41] Kuleshov followed Meyerhold's model in training his actors, subjecting them to a strict regimen of gymnastics and acrobatics. Kuleshov urged that each part of the actor's body be treated as an independent module

which could then be organized into particular combinations with other body parts in complex poses. Movement would also be a modular system. To this end, Kuleshov required his acting students to think of bodily movements, not as a continuous process, but as a set of finite segments. He used such devices as stop-watches and metronomes to help students pattern their actions accordingly.[42]

This stress on acting parts over wholes represented a Constructivist refinement of the Delsarte legacy, a theory of bodily expression that carried over from nineteenth-century oratory. François Delsarte had advised orators to develop a repertoire of poses and gestures, each of which was to denote a particular thought or emotion. His system was based on very specific prescriptions: "Love is expressed by a retroactive, never by a forward movement".[43] Such notions passed into popular theater and from there into silent-film acting where it was thought that broad gestures might compensate for the lack of speech. Delsartism was the orthodoxy at the Moscow film school when Kuleshov formed his workshop,[44] and he offered a guarded endorsement of Delsartian acting as a clearer system of com munication than the more nuanced methods of psychological interpretation that Kuleshov dubbed "reliving". To Kuleshov, Stanislavskian reliving lacked exact articulation. He claimed to test his assumption in exercises with his students. Selected students on a stage were asked to evoke an emotion before an audience of other students. The performers were required to internalize an emotion—to relive it—and then to evoke it facially. Students in the audience, however, proved unable to fathom the particular emotions being suggested, leaving Kuleshov to conclude that psychologically based performance produced ambiguities that worked against his ideal of precision engineering.[45]

From Delsarte, as modified by Meyerhold, Kuleshov derived his concern for the actor's exact physical articulation, and articulation would prove most predictable when it followed rote formula. Kuleshov proposed to ensure just that with the help of a chart. He charted out on X-and Y-axes a limited set of useful movements of various body parts. Performance was then to be reduced to choices from the chart, limited selections that could be organized in combination with one another to produce automatic effects.[46]

In this stricture, as in so many others put forth in Kuleshov's early theory, he adapted received conventions to a modern ideal of scientific control and predictability.

Kuleshov's overall effort to fuse the classical Hollywood cinema with the Constructivist ethos represented the same practice on a large scale. In the historical circumstances in which Kuleshov found himself, Hollywood filmmaking practice represented cinema's closest approximation to Constructivism.

Our inclination to relegate Kuleshov to an alleged right wing of Soviet montage would seem to involve an ahistorical judgement predicted on the assumption that the classical Hollywood cinema is essentially and forever a conservative force and that only radically alternative styles honor the modernist motive. But when Kuleshov appropriated Hollywood's conventions he did so from that same motive. To that particular theorist at that particular historical juncture, the classical cinema was the avant-garde cinema. It boasted an economy of signification that suggested to Kulsehov an idiom appropriate to the machine age.

Hollywood also had a proven record of popularity with Soviet film audiences, and if Soviet cinema was ever truly going to function as a means of mass persuasion, then it seemed incumbent upon Kuleshov to procure for the Soviets Hollywood's successful practices. To Kuleshov, whose understanding of the Soviet film audience may have been among the most realistic of the major theorist-directors, based as it was on observation, mass cinema had to be legible cinema, and the classical style was nothing if not legible.

The authors of the standard account of classical Hollywood cinema remind us of the centrality of Hollywood's influence on world film history by noting that "to go beyond [classical cinema] we must go through it".[47] However elaborate his path, that is precisely what Kuleshov proposed to do.

NOTES

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2 See David Bordwell, "The idea of montage in Soviet art and cinema", *Cinema Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1972), pp. 9–17.

3 See Judith Mayne, "Eisenstein, Vertov, and the montage principle", *Minnesota Review*, no. 5 (1975), pp. 116–24.

4 See Noel Burch, "The institutional mode of representation and the Soviet response", *October*, no. 11 (1979), pp. 78–95.

5 Ronald Hunt, "The Constructivist ethos," *Artform,* vol. 6 (September 1967), pp. 22–9; ibid., vol. 6 (October 1967), pp. 26–32.
6 Vance Kepley, Jr, "The Kuleshov workshop", *Iris,* vol. 4, no. 1 (1986) pp. 5–23.
7 L.Kuleshov and A.Khokhlova, *50 let v kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975), p. 75.
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9 Aleksei Can, "Constructivism, 1922", in John E.Bowlt (ed.), *The Russian Art of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), p. 223.
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11 The phrase comes from John E.Bowlt, "Constructivism and early Soviet fashion design", in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez and Richard Stites (eds), *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 205.
12 Aleksei Gan, "Constructivism in the cinema", in Stephen Bann (ed.), *The Tradition of Constructivism* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 129.
13 V.I.Lenin, *Samoe vazhnoe iz vsekh iskusstv,* ed. A.M.Zak (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973), pp. 14–15.
14 See, for example, L.Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film,* ed. and trans. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley, Calif. : University of California Press, 1974), p. 78.
15 Kuleshov and Khokhlova, *50 let,* pp. 75–81.
16 Hunt, "Constructivist ethos", pt 1, p. 27.
17 Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* pp. 78–82.
18 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 131.
19 ibid., p. 191.
20 Vance and Betty Kepley, "Foreign films on Soviet screens, 1922–1931", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* vol. 4, no. 4 (1979), pp. 429–42.
21 *Kuleshov on Film,* pp. 44–7.
22 M.Levidov, *Lev Kuleshov* (Moscow: Kinopechat', 1927), p. 3.
23 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 1–84.
24 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 58.
25 Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema,* pp. 157, 231–40.
26 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 92.

27 For descriptions of the experiments, see ibid., pp. 50–5; and Kuleshov and Khokhlova, *50 let,* pp. 78–9.
28 On this point, see Dana Polan, "The 'Kuleshov effect' effect", *Iris,* vol. 4, no. 1 (1986), pp. 95–106.
29 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 46.
30 See Lodder, *Russian Constructivism,* pp. 94–5 et passim.
31 ibid., pp. 22–5.
32 Levidov, *Kuleshov,* pp. 6–7.
33 L.Kuleshov, *Iskusstvo Kino,* (Moscow; Teokinopechat, 1929), pp. 62–3.
34 André Bazin, "The ontology of the photographic image", *What is Cinema?,* ed. and trans, Hugh Gray (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 9–17; Roland Barthes, "The photographic message", *Image, Music, Text,* ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), pp. 15–31.
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36 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 71.
37 ibid., pp. 62–6, 111.
38 ibid., pp. 58, 110.
39 ibid., p. 67.
40 ibid., p. 65.
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43 François Delsarte, *The Art of Oratory,* ed. and trans. L'Abbé Delaumosne and Angelique Arnaud (Albany: Edgar S.Werner, 1884), p. 54.
44 N.Lebedev, "Kinoobrazovanie v SSSR", *Voprosy kinoiskusstva,* no. 6 (1962), pp. 194–5.
45 L.Kuleshov, *Stat'i. Materialy,* ed. S.S.Ginzburg (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), pp. 157–8.
46 *Kuleshov on Film,* p. 112; cf. a similar effort to establish a movement chart in Delsarte, *Art of Oratory,* p. 5.
47 Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema,* p. 385.

CHAPTER 7
Films of the Second World War

PETER KENEZ

THE COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

All belligerent countries during the Second World War used cinema as a means of indoctrination.[1] Films depicted the heroism of soldiers and civilians, attempted to increase vigilance by presenting insidious foreign spies, and they deepened hatred for the enemy by showing his atrocities. Inevitably, Soviet works of the period shared a great deal in common with propaganda efforts made in other countries. Yet, when one attempts to compare Soviet films to foreign propaganda films of the same period, one is struck by the contrasts more than by the similarities.

Soviet film was unique because only the communists succeeded in completely mobilizing their industry. Judging by their movies, it would seem that Russians and Americans were engaged in different wars. For the American people, protected by two oceans and a fabulous industrial might, the war never grew into a life-and-death struggle. Washington was content to use its limited powers to influence the products of Hollywood. Its intervention was largely limited to withholding export licenses in a few instances. Studios made propaganda films—some of them vicious in their anti-Japanese racism—because audiences were willing to pay to see them.

American directors made as many war movies as the market demanded. The huge United States cinema industry produced 1, 313 feature films between 1942 and 1944, and of these only 374 dealt with at least some aspect of the war.[2] The great majority of films which the Americans saw in those years could have been made just about any time. Patriotic as the Americans may have been, the topic of the war did not dominate the national

imagination. A favorite American hero, Humphrey Bogart of *Casablanca,* showed his commitment to his country's cause and his essential decency, so to speak, in spite of himself. He would have been ashamed to speak of patriotism. In a Soviet picture such a character could not have appeared: for the Russians no amount of talk of one's love of motherland was too much.

The Germans, unlike the Americans, did fight a total war, and their government, unlike the one in Washington, did have the means to ensure that the studios produced exactly what it wanted. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, was a theorist of the modern means of indoctrination and had a fascination for movies. He took such an interest in casting and in other details that he could be considered the producer of some films. He was, of course, well aware of the political potential of cinema; and, indeed, under his leadership the Nazis produced some of the most repulsive and scurrilous films ever made. No film could surpass *The Eternal Jew* in vicious hate-mongering.[3] The Germans made movies designed to present the Slavs as an inferior race, historical films to instill pride in German history, and films that taught hatred of the British as a hypocritical, unscrupulous and cowardly people. Nazi documentaries flaunted the "marvelous" achievements of German arms and attempted to strengthen in their audiences a pride in their "race" and a love of war.[4]

And yet in its lack of complete mobilization the German film industry was closer to the American situation than to the Soviet. The great majority of movies that the Germans saw had nothing to do with propaganda. In 1945, at the time of the Allied occupation of Germany, the victors considered it necessary to ban only 208 Nazi-period films out of a total production of 1363.[5] The great bulk of the films that were shown were historical romances, melodramas and musicals, that is, escapist entertainment. The audiences were enticed by a promise of amusement, but once they were in the theaters they were exposed to newsreels that sometimes lasted thirty to forty minutes. From the Nazi point of view, such an arrangement was satisfactory. They assumed that larger doses of propaganda would turn people away. Just how apolitical most German films were can be seen from the fact that the Soviet authorities did not hesitate to distribute the captured films widely for Soviet audiences.

If at the end of the war a committee had attempted to screen nonpolitical, nonideological Soviet films out of the seventy to

eighty feature films that had been made in the Soviet Union, it would have passed only a handful: perhaps some films made for children, some film versions of concerts and perhaps two or three others based on nineteenth-century literary classics. All other films were more or less explicitly propagandists. How are we to explain the contrast between the wartime cinema of the two totalitarian countries?

First of all, Nazi rule was much younger. The Nazis had nationalized the film industry only shortly before the outbreak of the war, and the "untrained" audiences would have rebelled at a heavy dose of obvious propaganda. German audiences had to be humored. Directors and actors had a degree of freedom that would have been unthinkable in Stalin's Russia. They could bargain with Goebbels. They could refuse rôles and on occasion had to be cajoled to accept others. More important, the Nazi regime did not have the same degree of control over its artists, because it did not desire such controls. Nazi ideology was not comparable to the Soviet version of Marxism; it was only a hotchpotch of half-baked thoughts which did not and could not claim relevance to all aspects of human existence. Goebbels was satisfied with prophylactic censorship and with the transmission of a few themes, because he did not have a coherent world-view to transmit.

The Stalinist regime managed to mobilize the entire society and economy for the purposes of the war. The film industry was a small, but not insignificant part of this total mobilization. To evaluate wartime Soviet cinema in purely aesthetic terms would therefore miss the point. The politicians, and presumably the filmmakers themselves, wanted to have pictures (documentaries and feature films alike) to raise the morale of the Soviet people. In our evaluation of wartime Soviet film the central question must be how well the filmmakers carried out their essential task.

DOCUMENTARIES

In every belligerent country, newsreels were the purest form of propaganda. The Soviet case was peculiar in that the Soviets did not draw a sharp line between feature films and documentaries. On the one hand, documentaries at times included staged scenes and, on the other, directors made feature films about

real persons. The spirit and even the text of these two types of film were often very similar.

It is instructive to contrast the attitude of the Imperial government in the First World War to that of the Soviet government in the Second World War. During the First World War only five cameramen operated on the enormously long front line and two of these were foreigners. As a result, Russian cinema audiences saw a great deal more military action filmed at the Western Front than operations in which their own troops were engaged.[6] The Soviet government, by contrast, did not stint on resources. In the course of the war, thousands of cameramen shot approximately 3 1/2 million meters of film, producing a remarkable chronicle of the monumental war effort.[7]

By the time of the Second World War, the Soviet film industry could draw on an impressive tradition of documentary-making and had artists of considerable experience. Perhaps this long tradition explains the speed with which the documentary-makers could turn to their new tasks. The first wartime newsreel appeared in the movie-theaters only three days after the outbreak of the war, on 25 June, 1941. From that date on, a new edition appeared every three days.[8]

When film studios were evacuated from the capital in the fall of 1941, the documentary-makers remained in Moscow It was here that the raw film was cut, edited, and provided with accompanying material, such as maps or texts explaining the military action and exhortations to the people. It is easy to imagine that the filmmakers had to perform their tasks under very difficult circumstances. Since Moscow was threatened by the enemy during the first autumn and winter of the war, it was difficult to obtain even the most elementary technical necessities for filmmaking. In evaluating the quality of the first newsreels, we must remember the circumstances in which they were made.

The first works were the least successful. It took some time for the cameramen to learn to work under the new conditions. During the first months, documentary-makers rarely photographed actual military action, but were content to film second-and third-echelon troops. They filmed maneuvers and presented their version as if they were actual battles. Contemporary audiences as a rule saw through the pretense.[9] In order to improve the work of filmmakers, the Red Army set up special film groups at the headquarters of army units. These groups were headed by the most

prominent documentary-makers. These leaders had the authority to send cameramen to those segments of the front which they considered the most important. This organizational arrangement lasted through the end of the war.[10]

The main difficulty, however, was caused neither by inexperience nor by organizational flaws. The problem was that the reality was hardly suitable to be shown. Very little that happened during the first four or five months could be honestly told in such a way as to increase the self-confidence of the people and convince them that the war would ultimately be won. When the Soviet people most needed encouragement, the documetaries—which, after all, were to a large extent dependent on reality—could least provide it.

The most memorable of the early newsreels deal not with battles, but with the home front. A newsreel made in July 1941, for example, showed the intent and serious faces of the listeners to Stalin's first wartime speech. Looking at the faces of those men and women today, we get a vivid sense of the mood of that dark and anxious period.[11]

By the first autumn of the war, directors were making full-length documentaries out of newsreel material. The first of these, *Our Moscow,* was made by M.Ia.Slutskii, who together with R.L. Karmen became the most prolific and famous documentary-maker of the war. Slutskii's film, for which he received a Stalin Prize, dealt with the capital's preparation for a siege. Needless to say, the film did not show the panic which had seized at least some of the inhabitants. Instead, it depicted the air-defense batteries and the soldiers who manned them, citizens who heroically endured hardships, carried out their tasks and, during air raids, took refuge in subway stations.[12]

The next documentary, *The Defeat of German Armies at Moscow,* made by L.V.Varlamov and I.P.Kopalin, became perhaps the most effective Soviet documentary of the war. Clearly, the effect was achieved by the inherent nature of the material, rather than by the extraordinary artistry of the film-makers. Soviet people, like anti-fascists everywhere, were desperately eager to see proof of the first great strategic defeat of the Nazis. The film attracted huge audiences, and people stood in line to be able to see it. Watching the film reenforced the electrifying effect of the news. The movie did not present the actual strategic picture of the battle, and it contained not a single map.[13] However, the audiences did

not seek instruction in military affairs; they wanted to see defeated, bedraggled, humiliated German soldiers. The most effective scenes, therefore, were the ones showing German prisoners of war being led through Moscow, and pictures of destroyed German tanks and other war *matérial* strewn around the snowy fields.[14]

Aside from domestic propaganda, Soviet documentaries had international success, particularly the film depicting the victory of the Red Army at Moscow, which was shown in Britain and in the United States under the title *Moscow Strikes Back*. Such documentaries won public support for the Soviet ally and made large-scale aid more popular. *Moscow Strikes Back* received the award for the best "war-fact" film from the New York film critics in 1942.[15]

Following the success of the early documentaries, filmmakers made dozens of full-length films. The defense of Stalingrad, the siege of Leningrad, the battle for Sevastopol, the battle for Orel, and later the liberation of Eastern European countries all became subjects for full-length films. A particularly successful film made by Slutskii was *A Day of the War,* which depicted 13 June, 1942 in the life of the Soviet Union. (The film was based on the pattern of Slutskii's earlier picture, *A Day of the New World*.) On this occasion Slutskii edited the work of about 160 cameramen filming in different parts of the country. The film showed life on the front, but also depicted workers in their effort to produce the needed weapons.[16]

One of the documentaries, first shown in the fall of 1943, deserves special attention. This was *The Battle for Our Soviet Ukraine* by A.Dovzhenko. Not surprisingly, since it was made by one of the greatest Soviet directors, this was the most aesthetically satisfying film. Particularly memorable was the lovingly photographed landscape of Dovzhenko's native Ukraine. Like many other documentaries, the picture started out by showing the peacetime life of the country and then turned to the depiction of the war. Dovzhenko was the first among Soviet directors to use captured German newsreels in his work. For example, he intercut the faces of smiling Germans and suffering Ukrainians.[17] Dovzhenko's text in its laconic style very much reminds the viewer of the intertitles of his famous silent films.[18]

Dovzhenko was of course an artist of great originality. Other documentaries rarely bore the imprint of their creators. To what

extent, therefore, can one talk of a particular Soviet style of documentary-making? The Nazis, as well as the Soviets, understood the significance of documentaries, and accumulated a great wealth of material. We can assume that the courage of the cameramen on both sides of the battle-line was equally great. In any case, such matters cannot be measured. Furthermore, owing to the nature of the subject-matter, wartime documentaries made everywhere had a great deal in common. They all showed rolling tanks, the firing of batteries followed by explosions (though usually the explosions were not the result of the firing that the viewers had just seen), marching soldiers and so on. Without accompanying texts one could rarely make sense of what was being shown. All the newsreel-makers "cheated". They staged events for the camera. For example, the famous scene in which two groups of white-clad Soviet soldiers meet after having completed the encirclement of von Paulus' 6th Army at Stalingrad was in fact filmed several days after the event. Even from internal evidence it is often clear that newsreels depicting the firing of an artillery piece followed by an explosion could not possibly have photographed the detonation of that particular artillery shell In this sense Soviet documentaries were neither more nor less honest than documentaries made elsewhere.

It is in the accompanying text that we best see the peculiar Soviet style. American breeziness and flippancy or British understatement would have been completely out of place in a Soviet product. The voice of the Soviet commentator was always solemn and often bombastic. It is as if the commentator were not a human observer, but the voice of history itself. And it is perhaps unnecessary to add that each and every newsreel contained references to the genius of Stalin's leadership.

Soviet documentaries also differed from others made elsewhere in their willingness to show suffering and devastation. This was particularly true during the later period of the war, when the filmmakers did not any longer have to fear that painting too dark a picture might undermine faith in the ultimate victory. The Germans, who also suffered greatly in the war, preferred to skip over such matters and instead presented victorious armies marching forward. The difference between the Russian and German attitude to the depiction of suffering was primarily due to the fact that the Germans had started the war. Depicting war as misery could not possibly have served their propaganda goals. On

the other hand, a graphic portrayal of suffering deepened the Russians' hatred of the enemy. By showing pain and suffering, Russian newsreels retain an air of reality for the modern viewer that is lacking in the Nazi products.

MOBILIZING THE FILM INDUSTRY

The quick advance of the German army during the summer and fall of 1941 created extraordinary difficulties for Soviet cinema. One major studio, located in Kiev, was lost within the first few weeks of the war, and by September it became impossible to continue making feature films either in Moscow or in Leningrad. As the other major industries were moved east, so were the studios. The Central Asian cities of Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Stalinabad, and especially Alma-Ata, which became the headquarters of Mosfilm and Lenfilm, became filmmaking centers, and the studios in the Caucasus (Tbilisi, Baku and Erevan) acquired new importance.

In evaluating the quality of wartime films we must remember the circumstances in which they were made. While Soviet movies had never been able to match the technical quality of Western ones, the war brought about a further lowering of standards. The new studios lacked space, with shooting sometimes having to take place in courtyards and corridors, or even on stairs and landings, the laboratories lacked necessary equipment, and even the supply of electricity was unreliable. The directors worked under great pressure to use only the minimum of raw film, to spend as little money as possible on props and to produce a final product in no more than six months.[19] There was also the difficult practical problem of how to depict the ice and snow of Russia and the Ukraine, where the battles were fought, while working in torrid Central Asia. Thus one must admire Mark Donskoi's skill in making the viewer feel the harsh winter of the Ukraine in *The Rainbow,* a film that was actually shot in Alma-Ata. It is equally remarkable to realize that the battle of Borodino in the film *Kutuzov* was filmed in the same Central Asian studio.

Working in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, the directors were physically removed from the intellectual centers of the country. Prominent writers and directors discussed the problems of the industry, and saw in this separation one of the sources of weakness of the wartime scenarios.[20]

Soviet technology may have been backward and the film industry unprepared for the extraordinary demands placed on it by the war, but ideologically the Soviet Union was better-prepared than any other belligerent nation to mobilize filmmaking for the purposes of winning the war. In such matters a nondemocratic country possesses considerable advantages.

First of all, the well-functioning propaganda machine could change direction easily and at a moment's notice. During the first half of 1941, studios turned out anti-British and anti-Polish movies. For example, a film appearing in the theaters in April depicted the White general Yudenich as a tool of the British. *The Girl from the Other Side,* produced at the same time, portrayed an Iranian girl who helped the Soviet authorities to unmask a British agent.[21] Needless to say, such films disappeared from the movie-houses on 22 June. Sergei Eisentein, by contrast, could derive at least a little satisfaction that his passionately anti-German diatribe *Alexander Nevsky,* which had been banned for the duration of the Soviet-Nazi alliance, would soon be shown again.[22]

Second, and more important, the Soviet leaders had an exceptionally clear understanding of the importance of film as a propaganda device, and therefore they never stinted on spending scarce resources even at the most difficult moments. Even at the darkest period of the war, filmmaking never stopped and only barely slowed down.

Of course it was not enough to make movies; they had to be distributed and shown. The intention of the Government was to enable every village soviet to show at least two movies a month. In order to bring about this result, in 1944 alone the plans called for producing 3,000 movable projectors and training 4,500 mechanics to operate the machines. The Government did not spare resources for rebuilding bombed theaters.[23]

Perhaps the most impressive achievement of Soviet filmmakers was the speed with which they turned to their new task. Only a few days after the outbreak of the war, the first anti-Nazi works were already in production. The first collection of shorts appeared in movie-houses on 2 August, to be followed by two more collections during the same month. These were called *Boevye kinosborniki* (Fighting Film Collections). Each *kinosbornik* consisted of several shorts, as few as two or as many as six. The *kinosborniki were* numbered rather than being individually titled. Numbers 1–5 made up a series entitled *Victory Will Be Ours,* a

line from Molotov's first wartime speech. In 1941 seven collections were made and in 1942 five more, after which they were discontinued. The film industry could by then make full-length feature films, and there was no more need for shorts of this type. Although film novellas continued to be made, no more collections were put together. These collections were shown not only in the theaters of the land, but also to soldiers at the front. By all available evidence the soldiers enjoyed them.

The *kinosborniki* were obviously a revival of the short agitational films used by the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, the so-called *agitki*. At that time the shortage of raw material and the lack of technical equipment forced the directors to make shorts that were used primarily to spread the Bolshevik message among the peasants. These films appealed to an uneducated audience and proved useful in spite of the extraordinary simplicity of their message and their unabashed didacticism. Now that the Bolsheviks once again felt threatened, they turned to the use of a propaganda instrument that had shown its worth in the past.

The content, style and quality of the shorts that made up the *kinosborniki* varied greatly. They included humorous sketches, Allied documentaries on subjects such as the British navy or the air war over London, and simple dramas. The unifying thread in the first collection was provided by the imaginary figures of Maxim, a hero of a famous film of the 1930s, who introduced the shorts.[24] The collection included a short written by Leonov, *Three in a Shell Hole*. A wounded Soviet soldier, a wounded German and a Soviet nurse find themselves after a battle in the same shell hole. The nurse, a Soviet humanist, renders aid to both wounded soldiers. The vicious German nevertheless tries to kill her, but is prevented from doing so by a well-aimed bullet fired by the alert Soviet. The second collection included a short entitled *The Meeting*. This movie depicts the cruelties of the Germans in occupied territories, in this instance in Poland. The Germans execute a group of civilians in 1939 because one peasant saved a bottle of milk for a sick child rather than handing it over to the occupiers. One of the peasants manages to escape into the Soviet Union, and two years later meets the same cruel German officer, only this time he is an armed Soviet soldier. He takes revenge for all the victims, Poles, Byelorussians and Russians.[25] By common consent the best of these short dramas was *Feast in Zhirmunka* in number 6. This sketch was based on Leonov's scenario, and it was directed by

Pudovkin. Praskovia, a Soviet kolkhoz woman, invites the occupying Germans to a meal in her house and poisons the food. In front of her guests she eats the poisoned food in order to allay their suspicions and encourages them to eat. When the partisans arrive they find everyone dead.[26]

Perhaps more effective than the dramas were the humorous shorts. The second collection, for example, included a vignette entitled *Incident at the Telegraph Office* made by Arnshtam and Kozintsev. The entire film consists of one scene in which we see Napoleon at the telegraph office sending Hitler this message: "I have attempted it. I do not recommend it."[27] The third collection included a short about Antosha Rybkin, a cook in the Army, who aspires to be a hero. The war soon gives him an opportunity to use his quick wit to fight the Nazis with weapons. The figure of Rybkin became so popular among the viewers that director K.Iudin in 1942 made a full-length picture about him, the first comedy of the war.[28] S.Yutkevich made a short about the new adventures of Svejk for the seventh collection. He turned the famous character of the Czech writer Jaroslaw Hasek into an active fighter against fascism.[29] Svejk also became the hero of a full-length comedy in 1943.

In a discussion of Soviet wartime films, the Fighting Film Collection deserves special attention because this was a uniquely Soviet genre. In no other country would it have been possible to give the audiences such obvious propaganda. Americans and British and even the Germans would have found such products counterproductive. Soviet directors, on the other hand, had no need to disguise what they were doing. They could do this because their audiences had been prepared by decades of experience and because the agitation and propaganda machinery were already in existence. It was impossible to question the policy whereby the transmission of an ideology and the justification of the actions of the Government were considered not merely a legitimate, but even a highly desirable enterprise. Furthermore, Soviet theaters presented little alternative to the viewers during the war. Very few foreign films were shown even at a time when the alliance with Britain and the United States was at its warmest.

WAR FILMS

By the spring of 1942 the film industry had settled down to wartime conditions and had begun to produce full-length movies. The style and quality of these works obviously varied, but they shared enough in terms of basic conceptions and point of view to make possible generalizations about them. Between 1942 and 1945 the studios made seventy films. (This number does not include a few that were made especially for children, photographed versions of concerts and science films.) Of these, forty-nine had a contemporary setting, and with a single exception (a collective-farm musical which is described in the Annotated Catalog as "Vaudeville") could be described as war films. The twenty-one "historical" pictures made up a varied category that included versions of nineteenth-century literary classics and spectaculars based on the history and folklore of national minorities. One of these, amusingly enough, was an operatta, *Silva* based on the Kalman libretto.[30]

Although Soviet policy-makers quickly hit upon the main propaganda themes which then remained constant, in some peripheral matters the tone of films did change as the Red Army succeeded in turning the tide. The Soviet people acquired an unfortunate degree of familiarity with the particular brand of evil that the Nazis represented, and as a result films became somewhat less schematic and the Germans in them slightly more recognizable.

The theme of vigilance, which had been emphasized in the early period, receded in importance. Of course all belligerent nations were preoccupied with spies; nevertheless in the Soviet case this obsession had a particular flavor, no doubt due to fresh memories of the great terror. In the early films everyone, including children and old women, unmasked spies. A particularly amusing example of this genre was *In the Sentry Box,* a short that appeared on the screens in November 1941, The film is an unconscious caricature. Red Army soldiers uncover a German spy who speaks flawless Russian and is dressed in a Soviet uniform. He gives himself away by not recognizing a baby picture of Stalin.[31] The movie is based on a perfectly realistic premise: no one who lived in the Soviet Union in the 1930s could possibly fail such a test. It is the subtext, however, that is important: Stalin protects his people even in the form of a picture, something in the manner of an icon.

Most likely Soviet directors lost interest in making movies about spies as a result of an unconscious recognition that modern wars were won and lost not as a consequence of subversion, but as a result of national mobilization.

The experience of the individual soldier at the front has been a central theme of an extraordinary number of Soviet works ever since the war. Neither audiences nor directors ever seem to tire of the topic. Interestingly, however, and unlike the directors of the other belligerent countries, Soviet filmmakers produced relatively few movies about actual military exploits during the war itself, and the approximately half-dozen films which did treat this topic appeared during the last year of the conflict. One can only speculate about the reasons. Perhaps the struggle was considered too serious an affair to be depicted in adventure format. Or perhaps the directors deemed the stability of the home front a greater concern than the behavior of soliders under fire.

The most influential of the war films was made by the Vasil'ev brothers on the basis of A.Korneichuk's play *The Front* The picture (and the play) in a didactic fashion juxtaposed an older and younger generation of Soviet commanders, and, predictably, took the side of the younger, unconventional and daring ones.[32] Other war movies such as *Two Soldiers, Days and Nights, Malakhov Kurgan, Moscow Sky, Ivan Nikulin* and *Russian Sailor* were all undistinguished, ineffective, and were criticized even at the time for failing to show the face of the battle and the scale of the struggle.[33]

A much better subject than battles was partisan warfare. Indeed, films about partisans turned out to be the most effective and also artistically the most satisfying ones. The three most memorable films dealing with this topic share so much with one another that they form a trilogy. The first of these, *She Defends the Motherland,* was made by F.Ermler and appeared in movie-houses in May 1943. As so many other Soviet war movies, it starts by depicting the happy life of the Soviet people before the Nazi invasion. By recalling the wonderful past it sends the message that the people have much to fight for. Today these scenes appear rather ludicrous. Praskov'ia, a simple kolkhoz woman, is shown enjoying her life with her husband and son so much that she seems unable to suppress her giggles. On the first day of the war the invaders kill her husband and soon thereafter a German tank brutally squashes her son. Praskov'ia is transformed by the experience, and

escapes into the forest to become a partisan leader. She is accepted as such by the other partisans presumably because her hatred of the occupiers and her desire for vengeance are the fiercest. Rather improbably, she succeeds not only in finding the murderous Nazi tank officer, but with the help of her friends she manages to get him out of his tank and kill him the same way he had killed her son. She returns to her village because she hears the rumor that Moscow has fallen to the enemy and she wants to shore up the courage of the villagers by telling them the truth. The Nazis capture her and are about to execute her when her fellow-partisans appear, liberating her and the village.

She Defends the Motherland is an artistically primitive film which has the simplest kind of political message: the necessity of vengeance. Ermler gave few individual characteristics to his heroine. The picture obviously gave a vicarious satisfaction to Russians who had suffered so much. It could not appeal to foreign audiences. When it was shown in the United States under the title of *No Greater Love,* it was judged by critics as crude and stagey.[34]

A much more complex and successful work was M.Donskoi's *Rainbow,* which was released in January 1944. It tells the story of a woman partisan, Olena, who returns to her village to give birth, where she is captured and subjected to the most dreadful torture, but does not betray her comrades. The film has many characters who, unlike those in *She Defends the Motherland,* are endowed with individual traits that allow the viewer to identify with them. *Rainbow* has a powerful effect even on today's audiences largely because of its unusually graphic and detailed depiction of Nazi barbarities. For example, the Germans murder a young boy who tries to smuggle food to a prisoner and kill a newborn baby. Olena's torture is shown in naturalistic detail. A subsidiary theme is that collaborators will be punished. The wife of a Red Army officer who cohabits with a German is depicted with even greater loathing than the Nazis themselves. When she is killed by her husband who returns with the partisans, the audience readily accepts her death as just punishment. Similarly, the village elder who serves the Germans is punished by death.[35]

Zoia, directed by L.Arnshtam, appeared on the screens only in September 1944. The scenario is based on the martyr death of the 18-year-old partisan Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia. Like Olena in *Rainbow,* Zoia endures torture and prefers death to betraying her comrades.[36]

The most obvious common feature of the three films is that the chief protagonist in each case is a woman. By showing the courage and suffering of women, these works arouse hatred for the cruel enemy and at the same time teach that men could do no less than these women. The basic message here as in so many other wartime products is the necessity for vengeance. Two of these films include grisly scenes of Germans killing children. No crime could be greater in the eyes of the Russians.

The three protagonists are "positive heroines". They are presented as human beings without flaws—indeed, without individual traits. They stand for patriotism and an idealized image of Soviet womanhood. Artistically this is a source of weakness, for the viewer cannot recognize them as real human beings. *Rainbow* is by far the best of the three films because it presents secondary characters who are better-drawn and more believable than the central figure. The question of what makes a hero is raised implicitly in *Fatherland* and *Rainbow,* and explicitly in *Zaoia*. We see Zoia as a schoolgirl admiring the historical figure of Ivan Susanin, who had saved the Tsar. When tortured, Zoia says: "Throughout our lives we have thought about what constitutes happiness. Now I know. Happiness is to be a fearless fighter for our country, for our fatherland, for Stalin."[37]

The films show an interesting evolution. At the end of *She Defends the Motherland the* partisans liberate the village and save the heroine from execution. In *Rainbow* the heroine is killed, but her death is avenged when the partisans liberate her village. *Zoia* by contrast concludes with the martyr death of the heroine. The explanation for the differences is simple. In 1942, when the scenario of *She Defends the Motherland* was written, Soviet audiences would have found it too disheartening to watch an execution. But by the summer of 1944 the country was confident of ultimate victory and people did not need the false consolation of a phoney rescue.

Movies about partisans were effective at least partially because they showed most clearly the brutality and inhumanity of the Nazi occupiers. The depiction of Nazi behaviour made a great impression on contemporary audiences, because the description was fundamentally truthful: the Nazis were barbaric, and Soviet citizens knew it. These films conveyed the essential propaganda point that the Germans had to be resisted because they left no alternative. Since German occupation was extraordinarily brutal,

resistance to it was indeed heroic; the more vicious the enemy, the more attractive is the hero.

Although directors truthfully depicted Nazi atrocities, they were not successful in making the individual German believable. Especially in the earlier films, the Nazis were shown not only as bestially brutal, which of course they were, but also as silly and cowardly. Thus in a short sketch, *The Elixir of Courage* (1941), German soldiers dare to go into attack only under the influence of alcohol.[38] In another, *Spiders* (1942), German hospital doctors murder their own severely wounded soldiers.[39]

Soviet opinion-makers made the conscious decision not to allow the depiction of decent Germans. In 1942, Pudovkin used the stories of Brecht as a basis for a film entitled *Murderers Go Out on the Road* that showed native victims of Hitler's regime and fear among ordinary German citizens.[40] The film was not allowed to be distributed. In Soviet films there was to be only one type of German —hateful. A characteristic example of this approach was Romm's *Human Being No. 217*(1945), which dealt with the life of a Soviet slave laborer with a German family. All Germans, according to this film, are cruel, stupid, greedy and degenerate.[41]

The movies even projected the wickedness of the Germans into the past. A particularly unattractive example of this tactic was *The Golden Path* (1945), which depicted Volga Germans in 1918 as smugglers of Russian gold.[42] This work implicitly justified the mass deportation of ethnic Germans that had been ordered by Stalin.

Films that celebrated the achievements of the home front were, of course, without German villains. Interestingly enough, most also had female heroines. These works aimed to show that those who labored courageously and unstintingly at home made a contribution to victory. S.Gerasimov's film *Great Land,* first shown in August 1944, dealt with the evolution of Anna, who after her husband's departure to the front becomes an excellent worker in an evacuated factory.[43] By contrast, *The Actress* was a rather silly comedy full of improbable coincidences which raised the rather banal question as to whether art is possible in time of war. The answer, of course, is that it is not only possible but necessary.[44] None of the movies dealing with the war presented a realistic picture. *Simple People,* by G.Kozintsev and L.Trauberg, dealt with the evacuation of civilians and attempted to describe the confusion that prevailed at the time. The authorities found the

realism too strong, and the movie could not be released until 1956.[45]

NATIONALISM AND HISTORY

The Soviet Union is a multinational empire, and this fact presented dangers and difficulties to the propagandists. The Nazis, indeed, attempted to take advantage of the existing national hostilities and jealousies. Especially during the second half of the war, they encouraged the aspirations of the minorities against the Russians. It was therefore the task of the Soviet opinion-makers to parry the danger. In part the effort consisted of producing films that stressed the "friendship of peoples". This meant that the audiences would see, let us say, a Georgian and a Russian soldier going on a dangerous mission the success of which depended on their cooperation. At the end, either the Russian would save the Georgian, or vice versa. Since the United States also lacked ethnic homogeneity, the same pattern could be found in many wartime American films.

The Soviet people were supposed to fight a brutal foe in the name of patriotism. But what did Soviet patriotism mean? It involved mostly old-fashioned pride in the nation's past with a thin veneer of Stalinism. The Soviet authorities made a conscious decision not to stress the communist nature of their regime. The idea of proletarian internationalism was deemphasized, and the notion that Moscow was the headquarters of an international revolutionary movement was played down. Consequently we only rarely see communist functionaries playing a major rôle in organizing the home front or the guerrilla movement. *The Secretary of the District Committee,* a film made by I.Pyrev in 1942, is unusual in that the leading rôle is played by a communist. Those who went to their death fighting the enemy on film had the name of Stalin and motherland on their lips, not that of the Communist Party. It was, therefore, grossly unfair that after the end of the war the directors were taken to task by the politicians for having failed to show the leading rôle of the Party.

Harnessing the Imperial Russian past for Soviet purposes was a straightforward matter. No director could overdo the depiction of past Russian glories. The succession of historical films that aimed to show past greatness in order to inspire current audiences had begun before the war. Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* and

Pudovkin's *Suvorov* belong to this category of movies. During the war V.Petrov, who had directed *Peter the First* (1937–9), made a film about Kutuzov in 1944, while Eisenstein made his classic *Ivan the Terrible*.

An expression of Russian patriotism was a reemergence of panSlavism. The Slav peoples of eastern Europe were once again regarded by the propagandists as "younger brothers". They, and not the proletarians of Germany and Italy, were to be the allies of the Russian people in the struggle against Teutonic expansionism. This process also began before the war, but it was accelerated at the outbreak of hostilities. Never before had Soviet filmmakers paid so much attention to Czechs, Yugoslavs and Poles as in these years. The underground struggle of the Slav peoples against the Nazis became the topic of several films. A second-rate film about the Czech underground enunciated the theme of Soviet propaganda with great clarity: "The hour has come when the entire Slav people should unite for the quickest and final defeat of German fascism."[46]

The Poles, as always, posed a special problem for the pan-Slavs, for the Poles did not like being cast in the rôle of "younger brother". They also claimed territories that the Soviet Union was determined to retain. *Bogdan Khmelnitskii,* made in 1941, was bitterly anti-Polish, and Eisenstein's portrayal of the Polish court in *Ivan the Terrible* was obviously hostile. Before the outbreak of the war, Romm had made *The Dream,* a film that showed the miserable life of the people of the western Ukraine under Polish rule and how their dream was realized in 1939 when they became "free citizens in a free country", that, is when their region was annexed by the Soviet Union in consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.[47] Once the war started, it seemed inappropriate to exhibit this movie, and its première was postponed until September 1943. That it was shown then indicated that Stalin had decided that these territories would be retained at the end of the war, whatever the cost.

Soviet cinema taught the audience that Russian arms in the past had always been victorious. It was more difficult to deal with the past of the minority peoples. But Soviet studios were able to produce one major epic for each nationality during the war: *Bogdan Khmelnitskii* for the Ukrainians, *Georgii Saakadze* for the Georgians, *David Bek* for the Armenians, and *Arshin-Mal-Alan* for the Azerbaijanis. The directors, however, had to be careful to

choose a hero who had shown his mettle by fighting enemies other than the Russians. Indeed, it was preferable to project the "friendship of peoples" into the past so as to show, for example, that the safety and happiness of the Armenians had always depended on their alliance with the Russians.

Minority nationalism was a ticklish issue. While Soviet authorities encouraged a legitimate pride in one's past, too large a dose of such pride could be dangerous, for it encouraged demands for independence or at least autonomy, and threatened to undermine the willingess to accept the leading rôle of the Russians. The Ukrainians, to whom the Germans appealed in particular, presented a special problem. Dovzhenko, the "film poet" of his native land, wrote a scenario that Stalin personally decided to ban because of its nationalism. During the war the great director was restricted to making documentaries.[48]

It is striking that almost every one of the historical movies bore the title of an individual hero. Each of them aimed to show how an extraordinary person changed history through his heroism and wisdom. A characteristic example is the Kutuzov in Petrov's film, where the conception of character is diametrically opposed to that in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. According to the film, the old general was victorious not because he allowed his army to lead him as in the novel, but because he was a brilliant strategist. Gone were the days when Soviet directors celebrated the historical rôle of the masses. In the age of Stalin it seemed appropriate to focus on the importance of leadership and thereby to support authority. Cinema reflected reality: in the Stalinist Soviet Union it was the decision of the all-wise leader that mattered.

Today these historical films are difficult to sit through. Their exaggerated nationalism, their bombast, their unrealistic protagonists, their false pathos make the experience of watching them unpleasant. They distort history, since the directors had no interest in re-creating the past for its own sake. It is true that the overwhelming majority of historical films, wherever and whenever they were made, have attempted to use the past in order to deal with present problems. It would be foolish to expect Soviet cinema of the war period to present us with a dispassionate depiction of some long-past event or some long-forgotten historical figure. It is nevertheless extraordinary how brazenly the directors distorted the past, whether distant or recent, in order to make their points.

An entire series of films, for example, dealt with the German occupation of the Ukraine in 1918 (*Kotovskii, How the Steel Was Tempered, The Defense of Tsaritsyn* and *Aleksandr Parkhomenko*). In these movies the directors tried to show that the Germans had always been vicious, that the Red Army had always managed to defeat them and that Stalin had always provided wise leadership. In order to make these points the directors faced some ticklish problems. For the fact was that the Red Army had not fought with the Germans in the Ukraine, except in some minor skirmishes, let alone defeated them. Reality, however, did not deter the filmmakers. L.Lukov in *Aleksandr Parkhomenko* (1942) and the Vasil'ev brothers in *The Defense of Tsaritsyn* (1942) depict battles that never occurred. Indeed, had they occurred, they would have resulted in resounding defeat for the Reds.[49]

M.Donskoi brought to the screen N.Ostrovkii's famous Soviet novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*. In the book, Pavel Korchagin's adventures in the German-occupied Ukraine take up only a few pages. The film version, by contrast, concentrated entirely on this period. In order to fill the gap, the screenwriter had to rearrange some incidents and make up others. In the process Korchagin is turned into a nationalist freedom fighter. Almost everyone in the audience knew that the director had not been faithful to the original, to put it mildly, and yet none of the critics was disturbed enough to mention it in a review.[50]

Putting it in the context of the other movies made at the time, it is extraordinary that Eisenstein was nevertheless able to produce a masterpiece. While *Ivan the Terrible* (part 1, 1945; part 2, 1946) shares a great deal with other movies in the genre, it remains one of the great movies of all time. Eisenstein, too, aimed to show the victory of Russian arms, the importance of a heroic leader, and did not hesitate to make contemporary references. When the Tsar speaks of the importance of the British alliance, for example, the director clearly winks at his audience. Unlike other products of this period, however, this film is fiercely individualistic; no one but Eisenstein could have designed the highly original composition of individual scenes. And, unlike any other director of a historical film, Eisenstein created a complex and interesting character.

We started our survey of Soviet wartime cinema by pointing out that it was necessary to place it in an international context. It is just as important to look at these works within the context of Soviet film history. From this perspective it is obvious that the war

years formed a distinct period. It is not that everything changed at the outbreak of the war: the celebration of patriotism had begun in the 1930s, accelerated at the time of the war and reached ludicrous proportion during the last years of Stalin. The depiction of the "positive hero" required by socialist realism was a constant in the art of the Stalinist period, and so on.

The irony of the history of Soviet cinema is that during the war directors made propaganda films, which by definition distorted reality—they depict the enemy as uniformly vicious and stupid, and the Soviet people as clever and heroic—and yet these films were more realistic than anything that the studios had produced either immediately before 1941 or immediately after 1945. In the Stalinist years artists did not dare to touch upon any genuine issue facing society. Directors either turned to the past for subject-matter, or depicted a Never-Never Land of smiling and singing collective-farm workers who cheerfully competed against one another in fulfilling the plan. In this context the war, in spite of the dreadful destruction and suffering it caused, was a liberating experience. Films once again expressed genuine feeling and real pathos. The hatred for the enemy, the call for sacrifice and heroism and the sorrow for the suffering Soviet people were real and heartfelt. The directors believed in what they were saying. The period of the war was a small oasis of freedom in the film history of the Stalinist years.

NOTES

1 I have made some of the arguments advanced here in an article, "Film propaganda in the Soviet Union, 1941–1945", in K.R.M.Short (ed.), *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), pp. 108–24.

2 Dorothy B.Jones, "The Hollywood war films, 1942–1944', *Hollywood Quarterly,* no. 1 (1945–6), p. 2.

3 For an analysis of this film, see Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 190–206.

4 The best analysis of Nazi documentaries is still Sigfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Cinema, 1933–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 275–331.

5 David S.Hall, *Film in the Third Reich: A Study of German Cinema, 1933–1945* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1969), p. 8.
6 S.S.Ginzburg, *Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), pp. 180–1.
7 V.Zhdan, *Kratkaia istoriia sovetskogo kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1969), p. 305.
8 R.Katsman, "Frontovaia kinokhronika", *Novyi mir,* no. 7 (1942), p. 109.
9 *The New York Times,* 6 June 1942. The Times reviewed a documentary collection called *Red Tanks*.
10 S.V.Drobashenko, "Dokumental'naia kinematografiia", *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kino, 1935–1945,* Vol. 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1959), p. 562.
11 These and other Soviet documentaries are available at the Axelbank collection of the Archives of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.
12 Katsman, "Frontovaia kinokhronika", p. 109.
13 Drobashenko, "Dokumental'naia kinematografiia", pp. 570–1.
14 R.Katsman, "Perventsy kinopublitsistiki", *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 15 April 1942, p. 3.
15 The *New York Times,* 17 August 1942. According to *Istoriia sovetskogo kino,* vol. 3, p. 21, and also *Kino: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopedia, 1987), p. 66, this film was
chosen by the "American Academy of Film" as best film of 1942. This is, however, a misunderstanding. See also "Fil'm 'Razgrom nemetskikh voisk pod Moskvoi' v SShA", in *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 12 December 1942, p. 2.
16 Drobashenko, "Dokumental'naia kinematografiia", p. 576.
17 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 12 February 1944, p. 4.
18 R.Sobolev, *Aleksandr Dovzhenko* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), pp. 214–22.
19 See the letter of M. Il'in from Alma-Ata in *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 14 November 1942, p. 4.
20 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 24 July 1943, p. 1.
21 *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my: annotirovannyi katalog* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), Vol. 2, p. 265. Hereafter referred to as *Skhf*.
22 Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1973), pp. 365–6.
23 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 12 February 1944, p. 4.
24 *Pravda,* 6 August 1941, p. 5.
25 ibid., 11 August 1941, p. 5.

26 *Skhf,* p. 259, and A.Karaganov, *Vsevolod Pudovkin* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983), pp. 208–9.
27 *Skhf,* p. 256.
28 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 6 February 1943, p. 3.
29 *Pravda,* 10 December 1941, p. 3.
30 I based my calculations on *Skhf,* pp. 252–361.
31 ibid., p. 262.
32 ibid., p. 324.
33 See, for example, the reviewer of *Malakhov Kurgan* in *Pravda,* 10 December 1944. It is amusing to add that the reviewer objected to sailors using vulgar language.
34 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 22 May 1943, p. 2. *The New York Times,* 5 February 1944.
35 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 29 January 1944, p. 3.
36 ibid., 23 September 1944, p. 2.
37 *Pravda,* 22 September 1944.
38 *Skhf,* p. 260.
39 ibid., p. 294.
40 Karaganov, *Vsevolod Pudovkin,* pp. 209–10.
41 *Skhf,* p. 341.
42 ibid., p. 352.
43 ibid., p. 325.
44 ibid., p. 331, and R.Iurenev, "Ogon' smekh", in *Mosfil'm* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), pp. 175–6.
45 S.S.Ginzburg, "Khudozhestvennye fil'my o bor'be sovetskogo naroda protiv fashistkikh zakhvatchikov", in *Ocherki,* pp. 662–3.
46 The title of the film was *Elusive Jan.* See *Skhf,* p. 305, and *Ogonek,* no. 27 (1943), p. 14.
47 *Skhf,* pp. 271–2.
48 Marco Carynnyk (ed.), *Alexander Dovzhenko: The Poet as Filmmaker. Selected Writings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 30–1.
49 *Pravda,* 28 March 1942, p. 3, and 22 July 1942, p. 4.
50 *Literatura i iskusstvo,* 26 September 1942, p. 2.

PART TWO

From the Thaw to the New Model

CHAPTER 8
The New Wave in Soviet Cinema

HERBERT MARSHALL

In the 1960s and 1970s, an increasing number of Soviet films began treating the problem of artistic creation and depicting the writers, poets, musicians and painters of the past: Chekhov, Tchaikovsky, Vazha-Pshavela, Andrei Rublev, Sayat-Nova, Pirosmani, as well as some contemporary fictional figures such as the artist heroine in *V ogne broda net.*[1]

These films deal with the moral or ethical questions related to the duty of an artist to his people and his age. The questions were given expression in the post-Stalin period, but they were the basic ones that Soviet artists had to face all along, as Tvardovsky has written in his epic poems *Za dal'iu dal' (Beyond the Beyond)* and *Po pravu pamiati (The Righ t to Remember).*[2]

This is part of the New Wave in Soviet cinematography which had been missing since the middle of the 1950s, when the theme of the artist and his art disappeared from the screen. Soviet critics point out that for a time there had been a kind of taboo on these themes, because they had been compromised by a series of stereotyped and schematic "socialist realist" productions of the *malokartinnyi* (limited production) period under Stalin.[3]

The theme of truth and deceit by the artists had been dealt with in Soviet cinema first by Mayakovsky in his own early films,[4] then by Lev Kuleshov in his film *The Great Counselor* based on the creative work of O.Henry.[5] In his last days, Eisenstein, too, was working on a script based on the life and art of Pushkin which was never completed.[6]

The Soviet critics of the 1960s admit that the dichotomy between the biography of an artist and his creation that was shown in the Stalinist socialist realist biographical films has in

contemporary film fused into a unity of biography, human fate, history, morals and artistic creation itself.

Above all, the artist appears in these films as a kind of catalyst of moral principles. Creative art is seen not as a vehicle of political propaganda, but first of all as a means of moral expression reflecting the responsibility of an artist to himself, to his talent and to his calling.

DIFFICULT FILMS

The Soviet film critic T.Ivanov was commissioned by the film journal *Sovetskii ekran*[7] to write about the so-called "difficult films". This is a Soviet euphemism for films that do not fit into the prescribed categories of socialist realism and lack Soviet mass appeal. They are poetic parables, generalized metaphors that deal with the universal concepts of good and evil instead of the categories of "class" or "partymindedness".

Ivanov points out that such films as Paradjanov's *(Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors)* began the series of "difficult films", and since then they have grown "more difficult" and "still more difficult". Another veteran film critic who has commented on these films is M.Bleiman, in his collected essays *On Cinema: Evidence of an Eyewitness*.[8]

There is a new term now for the poetic school of cinema which parallels the school of Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko and Vertov, who were in one way or another poets. The new school is called the "archaic" school because it deals mostly with past events and eras, encompassing folklore, fairy-tales, religion and poetics.

Bleiman points out that there was a time when any new cinematic innovation was foreshadowed by a theoretical manifesto. He quotes in particular the famous "Montage of Attractions" (1923) by Eisenstein, the programs of Kuleshov, the declarations of Vertov, the FEKS group (Kozintsev and Trauberg) and the KEM group (Ermler and Johanson).[9] All their manifestos were published even before any original cinematic innovation. "Now", Bleiman writes, "such experiments and research are created without declarations of manifestos. They do not say they have a theory, but it is realized only in creative practice, and is simply more difficult to detect."[10]

In the 1920s different groups could issue programs and manifestos that conflicted with each other in style, in aim, in interpretation, even in political orientation. But with the coming of the dictatorship of Stalin and the complete control of the Party, which persisted in the 1960s despite the departure of Stalin, it was dear that there could be no individual variations of theoretical manifestos. The modern practitioners who have any theories contrary to socialist realism do not issue any manifestos or say much about theory, except through their films.

Bleiman goes on to say that such a school exists, despite the fact that it has no official "leaders"; it functions anonymously without any formulation of creative principles. While Bleiman wishes to write about the poetics of this school, he expressly disavows any intention of teaching these authors "how to produce 'correct' films".[11]

He notes that Soviet critics were "literally overwhelmed" by the appearance of a very good picture made by Sergo Paradjanov and his Ukrainian cameraman Iuri Ilenko, *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors*.

> Let us remember its laconic story, set in a Hutsul village, in a mountain area in the Ukraine, where the local folk character is still preserved under Soviet rule. The film starts with the accidental death of a woodsman saving a boy. That boy grew up with a girl who seemed destined for him. Their childhood liking gradually grows into youthful love. There will be a wedding, but on the eve of the wedding the girl dies; the youth suffers. He abandons his home village, wanders about, comes back. It would seem that now he will find happiness with another, but he can never forget his lost sweetheart. His new wife turns out to be unfaithful, he cannot withstand such unhappiness and is also accidentally killed. That is all.[12]

In the center of the film is not the story of an ill-fated love, not the tragic ruin of its heroes, but the image of a life-loving talented people preserving their national characteristics despite cruel historical conditions. Attention is drawn to the wonderful customs of the Hutsuls, to their religious rituals, their festivals, and their rites and ceremonies. Paradjanov and his cameraman Il'enko created an invaluable image of folk immortality.

Bleiman points out that the film's soundtrack might have been designed for a silent film, because the dialogue was not translated from Ukrainian although it was full of local dialect words. It was incomprehensible even to native Ukrainians, let alone the rest of the Soviet public.

"It may be that *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* turns out to be the source of the creative direction of the new school. It is tempting to think that it is so; in any case, the principles of the structure of this film have found their followers."[13] Here Bleiman gives further examples, which were the first attempts of the followers of Paradjanov, but which began a flock of films: *On the Eve of Ivan Kupala* by Ivan Drach and Iuri Ilenko; *Prayer* by T.Abuladze; *The Stone Cross* by L.Osyka; *The Color of the Pomegranate* by Paradjanov; and *Pirosmani* by Georgi Shengelaia.

On the Eve of Ivan Kupala was made by Paradjanov's former cameraman, Iurii Il'enko, and is based on Nikolai Gogol's short story of the same name, a grotesque fantasy. Made under the influence of Dovzhenko, it was a further expression of the New Wave of poetic cinema. In *Questions of Cinema Art,* another Soviet critic, L.Bauman, analyzes films by young directors. Here he deals also with the "difficult film" category, or the new "archaic" school, but refers to it as "the romantic school". He says "The noteworthy 'romantic school' is now coming into being in the Ukrainian cinema primarily due to young directors. One of the most significant expressions of this 'school' is the film *The White Bird with Black Marking (Belaia ptitsa s chernoi otmetinoi),* directed by Il'enko. The road to this film by Il'enko owes much to the significant innovations of *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors,* on which he worked as the cameraman."[14]

He then goes on: "Il'enko then made his director's début with *On the Eve of Ivan Kupala,* a film so complicated in its language and so confused in its content that it evoked reproaches of formalism." A supporter and consultant to the film, V.Turbin, called it "a lesson-conundrum". This alarm was confirmed: "the film remained non-understandable to the audience".

The Stone Cross deals with a free interpretation of a short story, a Ukrainian classic by V.Stefanik, in which ethnographical and historical peculiarities of a Ukrainian village are developed.

The film *Prayer* is again about a distant village, this time in the Georgian mountains. The film explores the fate of the great poet Vazha-Pshavela retreating from a painful civilization deep into the

distant mountains, where he meditates on the eternal struggle between Good and Evil. Parallel with this is a description of the life, habits and spiritual make-up of the small folk to which Pshavela voluntarily dedicated his life and poetry. It ends up with quotations from the poem of Pshavela about good and evil, about the demon and the sacred maiden, and with the story of a funeral and an allegorical story of the vanity of human strivings.

This film leads the spectator from the concrete to the abstract, to the struggle of eternal categories. Bleiman points out that again we have the beauty of the whole setting in superb cinematography; every frame, every shot delights with its pictorial refinement. "I don't fear to praise that which deserves praise: *Prayer* is filmed wonderfully."[15]

In these films every shot represents a self-contained part of the total composition; every shot is a painting in itself; every shot, even if it has an inner movement, freezes in its graphic expressiveness. At the same time speech and commentary also disappear, the whole film being accompanied by a reading of the poems of Pshavela. But these texts are not illustrative, and the poems do not coincide with the images on the screen. This is a principle of the new poetic school.

With regard to Paradjanov's second film, *The Color of the Pomegranate,* Bleiman says:

> The new work of this director is just as talented as *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* but more than that he demonstrates how his artistic plastic mastery has grown. Many episodes of the film, just as they are, astound one by their pictorial expressiveness. The film is based on superb knowledge of ancient Armenian art, a rich understanding of the principles of painting in general, of the art of the Renaissance in particular, and if in *Prayer* one is amazed by the superb graphic art, then in *The Color of the Pomegranate,* the viewer is confronted by the most subtle and refined color solutions. And there is nothing to be amazed at in this, because, as it develops, the school more and more perfects its painting style technique.[16]

Bleiman points out that the films of this school by and large deal with the past and that the only two that deal with contemporary events are in Bleiman's opinion failures. "And they had to be, the

poetics of this school could not create contemporary artistic images because it demands ethnographical material, exotic material, and a specific and strange understanding of history."[17]

The next question Bleiman raises is why this group of talented artists of the cinema, belonging to different nationalities and working in different studios independently of each other, have all developed a single poetic style that diverges sharply from the general line of development of Soviet art. He suggests that "it would be tempting to say that the films of the poetic school are a reaction to the naturalistic films which not long ago ruled our screens".[18] He uses the term "naturalistic" here avoiding "socialist realistic", but referring to those films which tend to ignore the visual aspect of cinematography that had once been the rule of Soviet cinema.

> The new school returns cinematography to the source of its natural quality of spectacle.... It returns not only beauty to the screen but poetry and painting. And to whatever extremes they go, the experience of the school has its influence; the expressive significance of every shot in their films so obviously reveals that. After the experience of Paradjanov in color-cinematography it would be impossible for color film to be simply a naturalistic unmotivated form without some kind of aesthetic system.[19]

And here Bleiman comes to a significant point which he does not develop: "Long ago Eisenstein confirmed the 'significance' of color; he said that 'one must film not color films, but colorful films'."[20]

This is the crux of the matter, for the new school has blossomed in the very areas that Eisenstein promulgated, but was able only to touch upon in his lifetime. These techniques were forbidden in the Stalinist period, having been castigated as formalism. Scathing attacks were made on the theory of "intellectual cinema", by Zhdanov, Anisimov, Yutkevich and other "dogmatists".

Here, in the new "archaic" school, intellectual cinema finds its fruition, based on the teachings of Eisenstein. His very last writings on color are brilliantly expressed in the films of Paradjanov and his colleagues.

Bleiman undertakes to defend this new school against the dogmatic critics: "On the very threshold one cannot negate the experience of this school and in criticizing it one cannot shut one's

eyes to its partial conquest."[21] But he notes that "Here is where the quarrel begins and it isn't a question of just giving good advice."[22] In this connection he quotes an aphorism of Neils Bohr that "a proposal for the revision of a theory was not sufficiently crazy in order to be true".[23] This applies to art as well as to science, for even sympathizers of Paradjanov have said that he was "a bit crazy!"

Bleiman also addresses the question of why this school has concentrated on the painting aspects of the history of culture and has seemed to neglect its literary aspects, because their soundtracks, though often verbal, are quite often as unrelated to the words as to the images. Yet at the same time they use great literary resources, the works of classic masters like Gogol, the Georgian poet Pshavela, the Armenian poet Sayat-Nova, and the Ukrainian writer Kotsiubinskii. But in their works the school ignores the variety of literary genres and reduces them all to a simple epic form. The poetics of their film scores are oriented only toward legends and parables. Bleiman contends this is a revolt against the naturalism that has filled the screen in the Soviet Union for twenty-five years. He adds that a parable points to a moral and that is exactly what the films of the new "archaic" school do.

Bleiman avers that the tendency to use the form of legend, parable and fable is also characteristic of contemporary art outside the Soviet Union. He gives examples of the drama of Brecht, Frisch, Dürrenmatt and the Soviet dramatist Volodin.[24] "When they reduce the editing of their films to a series of sequences of static pictures they ignore the teaching of Eisenstein on montage as dialectical conflict in artistic form."[25] According to Bleiman, the films of the "archaic" school use editing and cutting only for comparison and for bringing out static details. He says that it is not accidental that the characteristics of the school are particularly visible in its passion for ethnographic and exotic historical material. This may well be because contemporary themes are complex, dynamic and burdened by many meanings, thus making it difficult to reduce them to an abstract subject. In the case of historic parables or legends, on the contrary, it is a simple matter to reduce them to the opposing forces of good and evil. This is true in *Prayer,* in *Life and Death* and in *The Color of the Pomegranate.* "But one cannot say that today there isn't real life in the films of this school, though it is presented in a static stylized form, in an illustrative form."[26]

Bleiman then raises the key question of how it can be that the authors of such films, who strive to express the artistic image of contemporary actuality, at the same time insist on their canon and their poetics, which the contemporary image is unable to incarnate. Here is a contradiction.

Bleiman presents an analysis of the style they use, which involves allegory and the allegorical form of metaphor, here defined as the expression of an abstract conception in the form of concrete images. But allegory demands a certain perception; its language is stylized and limited by the members of the school who insist on the principle of allegory. He says their poetics demand "between-the-lines" allegory (he uses a Russian word *inoskazanie,* which really means "subtext"), saying indirectly what is meant through allegory and not directly stating the message. In the end the language of their films becomes a cipher, the key of which is known only to the artist himself.

He gives an example from *The Color of the Pomegranate* by Paradjanov. The very first shot of this film begins with a *nature morte:* on a white tablecloth lies a dagger and a cut pomegranate that is oozing its red juice. This representation is allegorical; you can understand it only with difficulty. The dagger means war, death, enmity, ruin; the pomegranate symbolizes life, growth, fruitfulness. The juice of the pomegranate is simultaneously the juice or sap of life and blood. And even here blood represents both life and death.

"I cannot deny the extraordinary power of the visual images created by Paradjanov; their composition is so expressive that one could imagine even Chagal himself would be envious";[27] but nevertheless "the metaphor is complex and the editing cannot be understood until the end. For example: incomprehensible is the appearance of the white chicken, a symbol of life which at the same time is headless. The allegory can be read only with difficulty and only towards the end."[28] The author provides no guidance for the perceptions and feelings of the spectator and instead gives us a code—a cipher.

> In order to be fair one must say it isn't always like that, for example: there is a very powerful scene just before the death of Sayat-Nova, when he is inspecting the cathedral being built by the masons. In order to increase the acoustics, they place clay pots in the wall (this was done in olden times). The

> masons ask Sayat-Nova to sing, he chants a poem and the masons immure the sound of these verses inside the clay vessels. When Sayat-Nova is silenced, his verses resound. The masons then say, "Sayat-Nova had died. Die, Sayat-Nova. "It is clear this allegory signifies immortality. The sound is immured in the eternal stone, in eternal clay, and will live forever. Poetry persists when its creator had died.[29]

Bleiman then criticized what he considered the complete lack of compositional unity in all the films of this school.

The preceding quotations from Bleiman demonstrate that in the Soviet Union there was a very serious, sincere analysis of the films of the new school before Paradjanov's film was banned. Bleiman is sincere in that he acknowledges the existence of a new school, one that is spreading and is different from the socialist realist naturalistic school. He does not give the real reasons; he cannot. He only tries to give artistic reasons.

In general, we should be glad for explanations that are not sociological. Bleiman is aware of them nevertheless. The allegories, metaphors, and the encoding and enciphering of stories are but the eternal way by which artists have combated censorship. This new school has done so through the use of artistic images, parables and allegories, all of which every Soviet citizen understands. They may find certain aspects of the allegory complex, because each is put in its own national form—Ukrainian, Georgian or Armenian—but the basic idea is clear.

And of course this much is understood by those critics who cannot understand the picture but are apprehensive of the kind of film, which is called in Russian "difficult".

Bleiman was not the only critic to praise Paradjanov highly. G. Manevich wrote about Paradjanov and his last film before it was banned:[30]

> Still one more step along the path of delving into the problem of artistic creation is the film by Sergo Paradjanov *The Color of the Pomegranate,* dedicated to the XVIIth Century minstrel of genius, Sayat-Nova. Onto the screen emerges a poetic self-contained structure. In it is synthesized the biography of the poet, of the social and historical fate of his people, and of his own creative work. The allegorical and rhythmic structure of the film approaches the living breath of

the poetry of Sayat-Nova with its highly original symbolism of love. For the creative work of the Armenian minstrel encompassed the basic themes and images of both the anonymous folk and the author's own medieval Armenian poetry:

> "Thou distracted heart! Hear thou me:
> Modesty
> love, conscience
> love.
> What is the world to thee? God
> love, spirit
> love, maiden
> love!
> Heed God's voice and do good,
> In the life of holy words-silver:
> Holy are three ends: love the pen,
> love letters, books
> love....
> Save your soul: Love also the monastery
> the monk's cell
> love, the stones
> love!"[31]

These admonitions, comprising the significance of the life and work of Sayat-Nova and many poets of ancient times, were the very basis of Paradjanov's film, as refracted in his imagination. Therefore the basic stages of Sayat-Nova's life—his childhood, his youth, his old age and his death—are resurrected in the film not as biographical facts, but as themes of his poetic creation.

The poet's parents, covering the body of the boy in a skillfully embroidered coverlet, apprentice him to study weaving. But Arutiun, the future Sayat-Nova, is indifferent to handicrafts. He is attracted to the wisdom of ancient books, to the beauty not of woven ornamentations, but the inspired visages of saints, intently gazing at him from miniatures and missals. A tiny, grey-haired, smiling monk beckons him into the "cell", "the kingdom of stones", promising to reveal to the boy the secret of being. Rain, sun and wind—nature itself, as it were—bless him in his chosen path. By sensing the value of immortality he himself becomes immortal.

> In the film of Sergo Paradjanov, *The Color of the Pomegranate,* the life and art of Sayat-Nova is presented as an inextricable unity, and that life and creative work in its totality is viewed from a certain scale of eternity, the basic stages of the poet's life having been generalized and deprived of particular characteristics that are peculiar only to the personality of this poet, and transformed into landmarks in the fate of all poets who achieve immortality. The history of Sayat-Nova's life transformed in his poetry and interpreted in today's cinematography is turned into a myth about a great poet, a legend about the Armenian Orpheus.
>
> To propose that other cinematographers follow the path of Sergo Paradjanov in creating films about creators would be impossible. To exclude from this unique production even one element, to exchange it for another—would mean the harmony of the film *The Color of the Pomegranate* would disintegrate. And to take it as a certain general principle of directorial method may lead to self-suffering "thingism", to aesthetic refinement only.[32]

I would point out that this critic is certain that any alteration of the artistic whole of this film would destroy its harmony. However, the film was banned and only released again after it had been re-edited by another film director, S.Yutkevich, against the will of its original creator.

Let us attempt a "Marxist" analysis of those "difficult" films: Abuladze's *Prayer,* about the Georgian poet Pshavela, and Paradjanov's *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* and *The Color of the Pomegranate.* In considering them together with others like Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* and *Solaris,* we find there is a common thread running through all the seemingly diverse films that Bleiman writes about. Though they are incredibly independent films, each worthy of analysis in its own right, their total nevertheless adds up to one thing, an expression of the age of cruelty and tragedy[33]—the tragedy of the innocent being slaughtered by implacable senseless social forces. This is clearly shown in *Prayer,* where we see what amounts to the lynching of an innocent man because of the tribal law of the vendetta. In *Shadows* there is the accidental death of a woodsman trying to save a child, then the accidental death of a bride and then the death of the bridegroom in a fight. In the case of *The Color of the Pomegranate,* it is the tragedy of a

court poet in conflict with his ruler as well as of a believer who will not submit to the demands of another religion; he will not be proselytized and therefore must die.

The very style in these films that Bleiman finds so at odds with socialist realism is precisely a style that refuses to soften the horror or the cruelty of the injustices that are suffered by the innocent; whereas the socialist realist films always soften the blow, none of them seeks truth to the end.

Bleiman wrote about this new confrontation in the 1960s, but when we analyze it we find that it arose in the late 1920s and early 1930s when Stalinism was being institutionalized. We will find confirmation of this in a book by Dobin, a leading Soviet critic and writer from the State Scientific Research Institute of Theater, Music and Cinematography in Leningrad .[34] One of the titles of his book is "Poetry and prose in cinema". He sets out to analyze the change of styles and the struggle of different orientations in the poetic cinema. Without this, one cannot understand the crisis of the great masters of Soviet and world cinema—Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko and Vertov—at the end of the 1920s. Like Bleiman, Dobin tries to reveal the different styles. But, in spite of the fact that both Dobin and Bleiman are Marxist, they cannot or will not dig into the social forces that create these different conflicting styles. Dobin points out the interesting fact that the turning-point of the early thirties came with the battle of two antagonists. One was the champion of the "prosaic", Sergei Yutkevich, while the other was the defender of the "poetic" antithesis, Sergei Eisenstein. In an article[35] Eisenstein pointed out that the achievements of the first Five-Year Plan for Soviet cinematography were in the poetics of cinema and that the failure of the second Five-Year Plan could be seen in the disappearance of the poetry of film.

The most vigorous attack on Eisenstein's opinion came from his fellow-artist and friend, Sergei Yutkevich. Yutkevich tried to negate even the value of that which was highly noted in *The Battleship Potemkin*—the famous leaping lions, the pince-nez of the doctor, the landscape shots. All of these did not conform to the style of film, according to Yutkevich, and that which differentiated the poetic tendency from the prosaic brought only harm to Soviet cinematography. Those whom Yutkevich attacked for their poetic tendency were Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko and even Dziga

Vertov, who had written: "I am a cinema poet, I work in the sphere of the poetic and documentary cinema."[36]

Yet all foreign critics had accorded these directors the highest tribute for their very poetry. Thus G.Dulac wrote that "Russia in its productions of *Potemkin* and *Mother has* created mighty visual poems."[37] The French critic George Aultman said in *Cinéma de Graphic:* "All that is new in Eisenstein was a mighty poem built from hewn boulders of solid rock."[38] Paul Rotha writes about the incredible poetic quality of *Earth* by Dovzhenko: "Dovzhenko combines inspiration of a poet and the rare genius of a visualizer."[39]

Dobin concedes that there were two sides to the issue. He indicates as directors of the "prosaic" school the Brothers Vasil'ev —who made *Chapayev*—Fridrick Ermler, Sergei Yutkevich, Mikhail Romm, S.Gerasimov and others.

The battle between the narrative and illustrative story style on the one hand and the montage of intellectually designed poetic segments on the other went on in the 1960s and early 1970s, as it did in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Dobin goes on to accuse Yutkevich of throwing out the baby with the bathwater when he identified the poetry of the cinema with formalism. It is sufficient for someone to say that a film or part of it was "poetic" and Yutkevich at once ruthlessly attacked it, as he did the ending of *Mother* by Pudovkin. This was so, in particular, because these films were allegedly based on the principles of French avant-garde as it had developed in the 1920s and 1930s.

Here we get the beginnings of the Stalinist attacks on foreign influences and the "bourgeois imperialistic theories" which eventually all the great masters were accused of imitating. Ironically, also Yutkevich himself!

Dobin in turn quotes the British critic Ernie Lingren, and the Italian director L.Visconti, who pick out *The Old and the New, Mother, The End of St Petersburg, Earth and Potemkin* as the very pinnacles to which silent cinema attained. Visconti interestingly enough said that these films represented a gigantic axis around which realism in cinematography continues to revolve. Such views suggest to Dobin just how wrong were the Communist Party attacks on the poetics of cinema, made in 1931–5, in particular by Yutkevich.

It is ironic to find Yutkevich in 1964 not only defending Eisenstein but even, as the chairman of the committee for publishing his archives, including all the "formalistic" theories that Yutkevich attacked in the 1930s.

The judgement of the Soviet critics on Yutkevich is that his aggressive attacks against the poetic tendency were one-sided and unjust since the power of the metaphors created by Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko derived "from the great humanistic ideas of the revolutionary liberation of the world. It is due to this that the masters of Soviet cinematography were able to reveal the new possibilities of the poetic language of cinema and to bring rich treasure to the development of world cinema art."[40]

Bleiman states that Soviet critics "have recently been alarmed at the emergence of such 'difficult' films" .[41] He points out that one of the basic characteristics of the "archaic" school is its parabolic character and its sermonizing, but he is not sure just what it is sermonizing. The code is too cryptic for the critic.

The whole of Bleiman's article attempts to show the difficulty in understanding the films of his new school, the results of their principles, their poetics, their characters, their artistic images, and the system they use. He then goes on to say that, though many of the films are successful, their success cannot compensate for their flawed poetics. One must realize the relationship of the poetics to the rest of the school. It is easy to say that these films are unrealistic and, at the same time, to deprive them of "the right to life" through censorship and a ban on their distribution—something that has indeed happened to so many of these films. Bleiman says their relationship to realism is very complex, and concludes that it certainly is wider than socialist realism. In effect, this new school strives to free itself from concreteness and in differing degrees to cut itself off from real historical circumstances. What it comes down to, of course, is that none of these films created the "class" image that has been promulgated by socialist realism. Instead, they created a *universal* image and allegorized the human condition in general. In *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* the priest in the church says: "The evil is out there!"

Thus the basic sin of the new school and of all of their artists is that they do not arrange things into class categories, but into human categories, and the Party is always at odds with this idea of humanism, this "bourgeois" humanism, this "abstract" humanitarianism.

And so Bleiman says: "Paradjanov consciously throws out the historical conditions. The relationship of concrete historical events to Sayat-Nova will not be found in his film. The actual history of Sayat-Nova was transcribed, transformed into a parable of the life of a poet, who is eternally fated to search for truth and to search for the answer of the secrets of life and death. Concrete images of history are transformed into abstract images of Fate."[42] Bleiman concludes: "that is why the school is in a permanent condition of crisis".[43]

He must end up, of course, with such official condemnation, although he seems to do so reluctantly. He says:

> …prophecy is not the profession of the critic, his job is only to constitute and analyze aesthetic phenomena. But in the present case, it is difficult not to prophesy. The film *The Color of the Pomegrana te* with all its uncontrovertible talent has brought the school to a critical condition. Even the most convinced followers of the school, if they don't want to become eternal stylizers, cannot go any further along this path, the circle has completed itself, the novel has been reduced to archaism.[44]

Then he ends with a qualification: "…this article is not a judgement but a conversation, not a condemnation but a discussion of its principles. The masters of this school are thinking and talented people, *but no talent can be guaranteed from committing errors*. It is necessary for them to think about that."[45]

Another Soviet critic, F.Fomin, attacks Bleiman's conclusion about the impasse reached by this new school of poetic cinematography. Fomin writes that

> Bleiman practically refuses the right to live, not to one, not to two, not to three films, but to a whole school, all at one go! Analyzing the causes for failure of the representatives of the so-called "plastic school", he actually maintains that the school has no perspective for future development. Why? On what basis does he deliver such a merciless judgement?
>
> The profound and brilliant argumentation of our respected critic is again built on a foundation of that same holy dogma: there cannot be good films without "full-blooded", "convincing", unique characters. But are there such

> immutable laws?... On the contrary, the great world success of such films as *Battleship Potemkin, October, Earth* were achieved by means of another basic principle...[46]

He goes on to point out that films are more complex now, many-genred, that there are now many "schools" and trends, making it difficult to say which is the dominant one. Particularly, when one and the same director produces so many different types of film, for example, Tarkovsky; and that "it is naïve and extremely illogical to measure all films in a row with one and the same standard measure.... Heroes and personages of a new type are now appearing on the screen. With these new heroes have come new means of representation, new principles to analyze human characters."[47]

Thus, Bleiman has sounded a serious warning to the creators of this new school, this New Wave—a warning that they are committing errors. Bleiman's article is a tribute to the artists and to those critics who strive to be honest and leave their audience to read between the lines. *The Color of the Pomegranate* lay on the shelf for five years, and Paradjanov was unable to make another film. Then, just as he was about to start a new film, he was convicted on a charge of homosexuality and incarcerated in a prison-camp for four years. Leonardo da Vinci, Petr Tchaikovsky and Sergei Eisenstein, among many others of the world's great artists, could all have been imprisoned for that.

All these Soviet film critics praising Paradjanov as the leader of the New Wave of Soviet cinematography stopped referring to him and his films following his imprisonment. Soviet writings of the next twenty years about the New Wave, the poetic school that has resurrected Soviet cinema, reveal no mention of Paradjanov—it is as if he had never existed.

However, it is encouraging to note that after serving part of his term Paradjanov was freed and allowed to return to filmmaking in the Georgian studio in Tbilisi. *The Legend of Surami Fortress,* completed in 1986, his latest film, has been promptly released and even sent abroad to international festivals.

NOTES

1 An idiomatic expression that can be translated as "There's no fording a fire".

2 The first was published, the second "shelved" but eventually published in *samizdat* and abroad. See the *Bulletin of the Center for Soviet and Eastern European Studies,* no. 8 (Winter 1972). I have learned that it was published in Moscow in 1986.
3 Stalin cut down production of feature films from a hundred to ten per annum. All had to be "socialist realist" and to deal mainly with outstanding Russian heroes like Alexander Nevsky or Ivan the Terrible. See Herbert Marshall, *Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 57.
4 Jay Leyda, "Poet & Czar", in *Kino* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 229.
5 See *Kuleshov on Film,* ed. Ronald Levco (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1974).
6 See *Izbrannye proizvedeniia S.M.Eizenshteina* (Moscow/Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1964).
7 *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 24 (1969).
8 *O Kino—Svidetel'skie Pokazaniia, 1924–1971* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1973). I shall be quoting extensively from Bleiman's essay "Chto segodnia? Chto zavtra? 1967–1971", in ibid., pp. 477–569. Hereafter cited as Bleiman. This book is a collection of his essays from 1924 until 1971. Bleiman was at one time labeled a "formalist" and attacked by the party dogmatists.
9 Bleiman, p. 478.
10 ibid., p. 506.
11 ibid., p. 507.
12 ibid., p. 507.
13 ibid., p. 509.
14 *Voprosykino-iskusstva,* no. 15 (1973), p. 46.
15 Bleiman, p. 518.
16 ibid., p. 521.
17 ibid., p. 524.
18 ibid., p. 526.
19 ibid., p. 527.
20 Bleiman. See Herbert Marshall's translation of S.M.Eisenstein in "On colour" and "The monologue of Boris Godunov", in *Film Quarterly,* vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 1978).
21 Bleiman, p. 527.
22 ibid.
23 ibid.
24 Pseudonym for A.M.Lifshitz.
25 Bleiman, p. 529.
26 ibid., p. 532.
27 ibid., p. 534. At that time, Chagal was still banned from general exhibition in the Soviet Union.

28 This is a specific "national" symbol in Georgian folklore.
29 Bleiman, p. 536.
30 G.Manevich, "Dbraz Khudozhnika v sovremennykh sovetskikh fil'makh" , *Voprosy kino-iskusstva,* no. 14 (1972), pp. 88–117.
31 V.Brinsov, *Poeziia Armenii* (Moscow: Moskovskogo-Armianskogo Komiteta, 1916), p. 257. (English translation by Herbert Marshall.)
32 Manevich, "Image of the artist".
33 Reference to Pushkin's "Exegi Monumentum" (1836): "V nash zhestokii vek…."
34 E.Dobin, *Poetika Kinoiskusstva:Povestvovanie i metafora* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), p. 11. Hereafter referred to as Dobin.
35 "Sredniaia iz trekh", *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 11–12 (1934).
36 See Dziga Vertov, *Stat'i, dnevnik, zamysly,* ed. S.V.Drobashenko (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1969). English edition *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov,* ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley, Calif./London: University of California Press, 1984).
37 Dobin, p. 18.
38 ibid.
39 ibid.
40 ibid.
41 Bleiman, p. 537.
42 ibid., p. 540.
43 ibid., p. 541.
44 ibid., p. 540.
45 ibid., p. 541.
46 V.Fomin, "Kompozitsiia Kharakterov", in *Kharakter v kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), pp. 44–5.
47 ibid.

CHAPTER 9
The War and Kozin tsev's Films Hamlet *and* King Lear

JOSEPH TRONCALE

In the Soviet Union today [the time of writing is 1986], the Great Patriotic War defines the self-image of the people and of the nation as a whole. The shining legacy of the Revolution has grown dull with cynicism and apathy, and has yielded to the power of the myth of the Second World War. The Soviet concepts of country and of patriotism are inextricably bound to their experiences of that war, its attendant atrocities, and the toll it took in their land. Emerging from such trauma, the Soviet Union has, in its own eyes, assumed the mantle of leadership in the quest for a peaceful nuclear-free world. The war has left indelible scars on the Soviet psyche. The trials of the nation during the war form a constituent element of the spiritual prism through which the Soviets view the world. It is an inseparable part of the Soviet world-view, no matter what the undertaking. After the war, the world will never seem the same to the Soviets again, nor they to the world.

There is a continuous and massive official effort to keep the memory of the Great Patriotic War alive. It is the duty of every Soviet to honor and perpetuate its memory and the memory of its cost in their lives. Writers and filmmakers, more than anyone else, as members of the official organs of education and propaganda, must respond correctly to this duty in the name of all the people.

At the 1985 Moscow Film Festival, just after the fortieth anniversary of the victory over Germany, top honors went to Elem Klimov's *Come and See,* a graphic depiction of the Nazi atrocities in Belorussia. This orchestrated gesture reconfirmed the predominant significance of the genre of the war film in Soviet cinema. Its purpose today, however, is not only to continue to remind the Soviet people of the crimes of Hitler's regime and of the brilliant leadership of the Communist Party as seen in the film festival's retrospective of "antiwar" and "antifascist" films, but also to

remind the people of the need for vigilance in the face of the ever-present threat of a nuclear holocaust.

This need to remind and to educate the people about the war has given rise to a phenomenon I would call *kinovoeniana* (war films) which, in many ways, is analogous to Leniniana in Soviet film-production categories. *Kinovoeniana* is a special category of film whose purpose is political and which reaches beyond the defined parameters of a conventional war film that depicts the physical hardships of battlefield life and the inhumanity of war. Since the war, *kinovoeniana* in Soviet culture has had as its specific purpose the continuous re-creation and revival of the myth of the greatest period of Soviet history under the leadership of the Communist Party, when the very survival of the country itself depended on the dedication, perseverance and loyalty of every citizen to the Soviet cause. It was a heady time of unprecedented unity and incalculable self-sacrifice under the leadership of Soviet power. If it can be said that during the terror of the 1930s death and sacrifice were senseless, then during the war no sacrifice was too great, no death more meaningful. As Katerina Clark points out, the Patriotic War is one of the great myths powering the Soviet Union; no nation is without myths of this sort.[1]

The December 1985 issue of *Iskusstvo kino,* the official scholarly journal of the State Committee for Cinematography and of the filmmakers' union, was exclusively devoted to coverage of the film festival. In that issue we did not impress upon filmmakers the significance of their responsibility to remind mankind of the tragedies of the Second World War and of the need for vigilance in the face of the nuclear threat posed by the West. In a round-table discussion of the films shown at the festival, Sergei Gerasimov spoke of a particularly urgent need that war films should address:

> Let's be honest. Even our young people are far from dedicated to the tragic events of the military past. There are even those among them who, not wanting to think about the tragic pages of history, would rather watch films of the most inane kind.[2]

In conclusion, Gerasimov held up Klimov's film as an example of the type of work that is compelling and decisively fills this gap in the education of Soviet youth.

Following closely on the heels of the fortieth anniversary of the victory over fascism, the 1985 Moscow Film Festival made antiwar and antifascism its chief themes. Significantly, during the festival there was a retrospective of the films of Grigori Mikhailovich Kozintsev. Given the theme of the festival, such a retrospective might, at first glance, appear incongruous to a Western observer since Kozintsev did not make any films that could be categorized as either "antifascist art" or *askinovoeniana*. There were also three brief surveys of Kozintsev's contribution to Soviet and world cinema in the December 1985 issue of *Iskusstvo kino* by critics from France, Hungary and Bulgaria. Although they do not depict the horrors of the Great Patriotic War, Kozintsev's last three films, *Don Quixote* (1957), *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1970), reflect the filmmaker's consistent and deeply Dostoevskian concern about the madness and cruelty human beings perpetrate against one another. His notebooks and critical essays written during the filming of *Hamlet* and *Lear* reveal a painful awareness of the extent of suffering endured by humanity during the war as well as an understanding of the root causes of that suffering. All of which, in the end, led him to a discovery of new and deeper levels of meaning in Shakespeare.

Over the past four years Valentina Georgievna Kozintseva, the filmmaker's widow, and her colleague Iakov Leonidovich Butovskii have collaborated on the distinctive five-volume *Collected Works of G.M.Kozintsev*. All of this is to say that, although he died thirteen years ago, in May 1985 his influence on contemporary Soviet cinema was still strongly felt. And in the Soviet Union his name stands with those of Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, Pudovkin and Vertov as a pioneer in Soviet and world cinema.

Searching laboriously for his own cinematic expression of human spirituality and social interaction in the world of Shakespeare, Kozintsev read unceasingly and reflected on his own experiences. Among many others, he read and reread Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gogol, Pushkin, Chekhov, Camus, Cervantes and Goethe. He pondered the innovations of Chaplin, Wells, Olivier and Kurasawa, of Peter Brook, Gordon Craig and Meyerhold. He visited the Museum of Hiroshima and the death-camps of Buchenwald, Auschwitz and Treblinka. But, more than anything or anyone else, the most significant element in the formulation of Kozintsev's contemporary lyrical images of Shakespeare were his

own experiences during the reign of Stalin as well as the massive suffering experienced by humanity during the Great Patriotic War.

Ivan Karamazov demanded justice for the suffering innocents. Perplexed and outraged at man's inhumanity to man, he wanted to turn in his ticket to life early. He was embattled between life and principle, and the storm ravaged everyone he knew. As Dostoevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov,* this is what Russians do. They come together from the corners of their lives and fill long hours discussing with each other those burning eternal questions, endlessly posed, but never resolved. War and the threat of war, violence and physical torture in every conceivable form, oppression of the human spirit—these are the facts that have generated the questions of human existence for centuries. As Kozintsev recognized, our age is no different. The dominant images of our century are the jackboot and the concentration-camp, the tank and the whistling bomb.

From this perspective on our age, Grigori Kozintsev created his masterpieces for the cinema, *Hamlet* and *King Lear.* Posing the questions he had learned so well from his study of the masters of nineteenth-century Russian literature and drawing on his own life experiences in the Soviet Union from the 1930s onward and, particularly, during the Great Patriotic War, Kozintsev makes clear Shakespeare's poignant relevancy to the twentieth century. Eschewing ostentatiousness and pageantry in any form in his productions, he focused on the universal issues that make Shakespeare immortal. *Hamlet* and *Lear,* of course, are not war films in the strict sense, but the director's vision in the production of these two films cannot be divorced from the most devastating, compelling and cathartic experiences that any people or nation has ever endured or from its significance in that nation's memory. Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *Lear* are the lessons of one of this century's most traumatic nightmares. They are the contribution of a survivor to keep alive the memory of man's most extreme inhumanity to man lest it should ever happen again. In 1968, Kozintsev wrote the following in his notebook on the production of *Lear:*

> It is a mistake to relate Lear to prehistoric times. It's as if the farther back into the centuries one goes, the greater the bestiality of people. Did they drop the bomb on Hiroshima

> during the time of the Carolingians? Was Auschwitz planned and built at the time of the Goths?[3]

Gross violation of trust, a massive breakdown of relationships, utter violence and deceit, the perpetration of singularly unconscionable deeds, the absolute humiliation and dehumanization of humanity—*in extremis*, all of this is war. These are the themes of Shakespeare's tragedies; they are the current themes of our century. Thus war is the chief theme of Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. These films are his monuments to all victims of humanity's madness and folly in much the same way as the monuments standing at Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Babi Yar and Treblinka. In 1961, after visiting Buchenwald, Kozintsev made this entry in his notebook:

> 11 X 61 Buchenwald Memory. A person must be cultured, that is, he must know the past. Memory and forgetting….
>
> These monuments. Monuments of mankind. Primitive torture cells and our century.
>
> As to the question of contemporary style. Monumentalism.
>
> Teutonic monuments and the blood drenched earth of Buchenwald.
>
> Is it worth putting… Hamlet in the archives?[4]

Kozintsev's doubt that any image could be more moving than a monument to human life wasted so wantonly according to a coldly calculated and premeditated plan is understandable. Equally so is his doubt that he could successfully draw on the raw emotional energy of humanity's memory of such experiences to forge a deeper understanding of *Hamlet* and *Lear* for contemporary man. These doubts haunted him constantly during the filming of both tragedies. Yet it is his very preoccupation with these aspects of the war experience that affected his creative process so deeply in making these two films.

Kozintsev's vocabulary in his notebooks and monographs is that of a survivor of those times, a witness to one of those points in history when human tragedy in its excruciating suffering and boundless destruction seems to surpass all previous markers in scope and severity. As a filmmaker-auteur, Kozintsev's cinematic metaphors articulate that written vocabulary. As he explains:

> What I am trying to grasp, to clarify by a written note is the rough draft of a shot. I compress an idea with associations to the point at which it becomes visual; the idea must materialize. And, having become a segment of a film, it ceases to exist as something defined by words.[5]

Searching for his key to Shakespeare's world, Kozintsev envisioned before him three caskets. In one of them, he would find this key, and he imagined that the external appearance of each would suggest the answer. The first, made of gold, suggested "cinematic gilding" à la Cecil B.DeMille. The second, of silver, decorated with jeans, a black sweater, and phrases from Kafka and Camus, appeared contemporary, but too chic. The third casket was of iron, as Kozintsev writes,

> unattractive steel, cast from mine fragments, from the barbed wire of concentration camps, from police handcuffs and prison bars. It is like a small parcel of land under a stone slab in Buchenwald. Soil has been brought here from the other concentration camps. They dug it up from the places where people were shot. The soil was drenched with blood. I open this casket. I carefully lift the stone slab at Buchenwald.[6]

And therein is Kozintsev's key to the world of Shakespeare.

Playing on the two key elements in the Soviet memory of the Great Patriotic War, Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *Lear* complement one another. *Hamlet* serves as a treatise on the tyranny of fascism and the consequent dehumanization of humanity, and *Lear* as the story of spiritual rebirth at the cost of enormous physical and psychological suffering. To convey these ideas, the director has placed particular emphasis on certain scenes in both films. The cinematic metaphors, or, as Lotman puts it, the pictorial narrative, are not an illustration of the verbal narrative of Shakespeare's text.[7] They signify an essential meaning of that text perceived by the director as the verbal narrative is filtered through his own life experience.

Kozintsev's *Hamlet* does not begin with the return of King Hamlet's ghost, but with shots of the draping of the kingdom in black, of Hamlet on horseback speeding toward the castle and being met by his mother in tears, of the painfully drawn out process of the raising of the drawbridge and the closing of the

entrance gate. The final introductory shot is of the herald announcing the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude. In less than three minutes, Kozintsev establishes that Denmark is a prison in the vise-grip of a tyrant. It is a kingdom where, as Hamlet says, to think is to suffer, for it is thinking about what has happened that makes one conclude that Denmark is a prison. In his essay on *Hamlet,* Kozintsev writes:

> Hamlet's words do not leave audiences cold. Our memories retain the fire and tears paid for the numbing of the soul of human bonds, for power rooted in inhumanity. Its atoms are retained in nations and in souls. A modern Elsinore would have no objection to closing the barbed wire of concentration camps around humanity like a crown of thorns.[8]

As Kozintsev explains so clearly in his production notebook as well as in his monograph *Our Contemporary William Shakespeare,*[9] the young student prince from Denmark swims against the tide. Conscience is dead in Elsinore; no one questions the sudden death of his father and the subsequent all too sudden marriage of his uncle to his mother. Denmark is indeed a prison, and Elsinore its heart. Hamlet's return from Wittenberg, a center of humanism in Shakespeare's time, begins the slow painful reawakening of conscience there. The harsh truth behind his uncle's speedy ascent to the throne dawns on Hamlet as he observes Claudius presiding in the council chamber and hears Gertrude's words, "Thus is the world created".

At this point, the words "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,/Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew," begin as Hamlet walks silently through a sea of courtiers. He is in their midst and the camera cannot get to him or focus on him. He is lost in a sea of sychophants. Flowing against the stream, Hamlet is himself a current of thought, distinct as the only one who will raise the feared questions of existence and death, of man's worth. He alone will prick the conscience of society. This monologue as well as "To be or not to be" are not spoken to the camera, but were later added to the soundtrack by Smoktunovsky. Kozintsev considered the monologues not speeches but processes of thought, the explosive force of ideas, threatening Claudius' reign.[10] The camera follows Hamlet almost as a spy sent to keep him under surveillance, so as not to lose sight of this most dangerous of all

men who dares to think and listen to the voice of conscience. Moving as he does between the universal human experiences of the Second World War and his own personal experiences during Stalin's reign, Kozintsev writes:

> Hamlet expressed not only the personal tragedy of the prince-student, but also the historical tragedy of people given too much to thought. The time arrived when to think meant to suffer. After two centuries there appeared a definition—the misfortune of thought *(gore ot uma)*.[11]

Then there are those who are not plagued by thought or conscience. These are the Osrics and the Poloniuses, the Rozencrantzs and the Guildensterns who curry favor with the powerful. Spying on Hamlet, they are only loyal servants fulfilling the King's wishes. Kozintsev perceives the qualities of Hitler's SS in these characters and thus extracts a further measure of contemporary power from them.[12] He emphasizes their toadyism by bringing several episodes of it to the foreground in the film. Two such episodes, considered major by the director, are striking because of this new level of meaning which Kozintsev reveals in them.[13] The first follows the scene arranged by Polonius for the King in which Ophelia returns Hamlet's gifts with the words:

> Take these again; for to the noble mind
> Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

Polonius is waiting with the King, both within earshot of the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia. Emotionally distraught after her exchange with Hamlet, Ophelia runs to the arms of her father for comfort. Annoyed, Polonius coldly waves her away and, quick to assert his further usefulness, turns to the King and plans the fatal scene where he will eavesdrop on Hamlet's conversation with his mother. Polonius is insensitive to the pleas of his own daughter when the King's favor is at stake.

The second scene follows the excitement caused by the King's stormy exit at the end of the play "The Mousetrap". Sent by the Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seek some explanation from Hamlet for his distempered behavior. The players enter with their recorders. Taking one from them, Hamlet asks Guildenstern to play it. Guildenstern refuses, saying: "I know no touch of it, my

lord." Responding, Hamlet says: "It is as easy as lying; govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music." Again Guildenstern refuses. The scene now reaches its climax in the chilling indictment of Smoktunovsky's cold stare and the indignant outraged innocence in his almost quivering voice when he says: "'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me." In his preparatory materials for the second edition of *Glubokii ekran (Screen Depth),* using a metaphor similar to Hamlet's, Kozintsev wrote of his experiences in making the pictures *Karl Marx, Pirogov* and *Belinsky* (roughly from 1947 to 1951):

> …we poorly understood the demands which people little schooled in the arts began to make of the screen. In one film, they wanted to see everything that the great man did. They wanted not only his deeds, but also his words. The great man had to speak in an exalted form of his love for the people and of his hatred for the enemies of the people. The demands became more and more insistent. Even the necessary texts were suggested. The area of the director's creativity grew narrower and narrower. The first order of business was dubbing. Only I was not the one to do the dubbing, rather they wanted to dub me. The task was (and I was poorly suited for it) to synchronize my lips to someone else's text.[14]

Hamlet must be cruel to be kind. And, for us to remember man's inhumanity to man and to prevent it when we can, we must be subjected to some harsh reminders. One of Kozintsev's most powerful and painful scenes in *Hamlet* is that moment when Hamlet turns his mother's eyes into her own soul. He cruelly awakens her conscience so completely that she even refuses the advances of the King from this point on as a later scene added by Kozintsev shows. She understands the darkness of her collusion with Claudius and acknowledges her complicity in his crime. In the tradition of Dostoevsky, Kozintsev's delivery of the theme of moral responsibility and complicity has a powerfully dramatic impact. The cruelty of Kozintsev's scene is reminiscent of a scene from *Crime and Punishment*. Kozintsev writes of it himself:

> The first dream of Raskolnikov is unbearable to read. Dostoevsky grabs you by the throat and beats the life out of you. It's not a horse, but you that he strikes across the eyes: look, you animal, this is life—and it's your life, your complicity (albeit even passive) in evil.[15]

King Lear takes up where *Hamlet* leaves off. In *Hamlet,* although the foundations of tyranny are shaken by the man of thought, we witness no rebirth, but only death as the wages of such gross violation of humanity. After a lifetime of ruthlessly wielding power, Lear steps down to give way to youth and divides his kingdom to forestall any powerscrapes between his heirs. At this point, all of his sins begin to come home to roost. His only loyal daughter, Cordelia, is exiled by his own hand; he is abandoned by Goneril and Regan, his two other daughters; and Lear stands alone except for Kent and his fool. For his megalomania and abuse of power, Lear pays a very high price. Reduced physically and spiritually to a vagabond beggar, he is dehumanized and degraded at the hands of his own daughters.

However, if the quickness of his descent is dizzying, his rebirth and recovery are no less dramatic. Again adhering to the traditions of Russian art, Kozintsev clearly shows suffering as the *sine qua non* of the mechanics of the rebirth of humanity and the transfiguration of our world. In the *Notes from the Underground,* Dostoevsky wrote that "Suffering is, after all, the sole cause of consciousness", and in the Underground Man's opinion "consciousness is man's supreme misfortune".[16] Accordingly, the Cartesian formula, *cognito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), is no longer valid. Instead, after the experiences of the Second World War, the atom bomb and the death-camps, the epithet of our century has become *patior ergo sum* ("I suffer, therefore I am"). For Kozintsev, Lear epitomizes the suffering of humanity during the war and man's rebirth afterward.

In *King Lear,* Kozintsev organized his film imagery around the elements of nature: fire, wind, water and the earth. His elemental ontological concern for man is reflected in austere images of nature which are always functioning on a physical as well as a metaphysical level. The "philosophical landscapes" he creates constantly prod Lear toward his rebirth and eventual transfiguration. In Kozintsev's film all of reality becomes a metaphor that reflects in its raw elemental power the truth of why

and how one has lost the way, and the point in time and space when one begins the return journey toward self, the moment when consciousness begins to exceed the boundaries of self.

Kozintsev's choice of the four elements as the organic structure of the poetic idea of self-discovery is an ingenious reading of the individual exchanges of Edgar, Lear and Edmund with nature. Edmund mocks man's penchant for blaming his misfortunes on nature's whims. Lear summons the forces of nature to smite the stone-hearted and the ungrateful. And Edgar, himself reduced to Poor Tom, realizes his good fortune and taunts nature to rear its head, for he has nothing more to fear from anyone or anything.

The predominant image by far is fire and the related images of light, lightning, sight and blindness. Kozintsev had in mind a distinct progression of this dramatic motif used in the film.[17] It begins with the fire of the torches lighting the inner castle in the opening sequence of the scene in which the kingdom is divided. Illuminated only by the quivering flames of wall-mounted torches, the Great Hall is lit in the subtle chiaroscuro of passion, deceit and filial loyalty to be played there. The entrance of Cordelia is stunning. She emerges to the center from behind a flame that occupies the right side of the frame. While she proceeds to the Great Hall with her sisters, and throughout the ordeal of forced professions of filial love, Cordelia is radiantly illuminated, bathed in lighting brighter by far than that on any other character and equal in brilliance to the fire of the torches. There is no doubt in whose heart the flame of filial love burns brightest, while Goneril and Regan loom in the shadows.

The motif continues when Lear enters and goes immediately to warm himself by the family hearth. One of the first shots of him is through the fire and smoke of the enormous fireplace. He greedily warms himself by this center of family life, the destruction of which by his own hands is imminent. Lear's passion to be flattered and cajoled makes unnatural demands on the source of family warmth, true filial love and loyalty, and transforms it into the consuming fire that engulfs and destroys him, his three daughters, and brings the entire kingdom to the brink of annihilation.

There is further resonance of the fire imagery in those scenes not found in Shakespeare's text but which the cinema give the director the liberty to create. This freedom and breadth of lyrical expression in the cinema is the chief reason Kozintsev thought that

the cinema rather than the theatre is closer to the poetry of Shakespeare.[18] There is the shot of Lear's torch-lit entourage winding its way through the countryside from one daughter to the other. Later, the screen is filled with the flames of the conqueror's bonfires in the city square. At one point, wild-eyed in the heat of battle, Edmund commands the soldiers to burn the villages and he initiates the process by setting fire to a thatched roof. Catapults hurl barrels of burning tar, a city burns, and the earth is engulfed in flames. In the closing shots, the camera pans the charred remnants of civilization. Out of the scorched earth rise the stone chimneys of what once served as the family hearths. Of the logic of this dramatic motif Kozintsev writes:

> The range of the movement is from the fire of the hearth to an incinerated world; from Cordelia's scarcely audible "nothing" to Lear's scream over her body, to the howling and gnashing of space engulfed in flames. This is the memory of the museum of Hiroshima: Man learned to strike a fire to facilitate life.[19]

Kozintsev's is a *Lear* of the nuclear age. Again, it is clear that it is his constant living memory of the war that motivated Kozintsev to develop the specificity of this motif. Watching Kurosa wa's *Ran,* one senses almost immediately a similarity in this with Kozintsev. There is a bond between these two filmmakers that was created by the deep sense of loss and human suffering that their respective nations, perhaps more than any other, endured during the Second World War. And it is with the sense of a survivor driven by the moral imperative to ensure that no one forget this suffering that Kozintsev made the searing memory of human suffering a part of *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. While preparing his production of *Lear,* Kozintsev went to Japan. While there, he visited the Museum of Hiroshima and wrote of the experience:

> Finally though with difficulty they gathered the school children in the final exhibition hall. Above the door leading to the exit was a farewell message: "Men and women, young and old, let us pray for the souls of the deceased. May they rest in peace."
>
> Laughter, the shuffling of feet: the children continued their games. It is clear that the remnants of the suffering and the

> words of suffering have become unreal for the younger generations, something related not to the relatively recent past, but to pre-history or to ancient legend, or to conjectures about what could never in fact happen. I am working on King Lear and I am thinking about all of this.[20]

At the end of the film, the people wander in silence through the scorched ruins of their homeland, sifting through the rubble to start all over again. A note of hope in the midst of death and destruction. This image of humanity's ultimate victory over war echoes the earlier image of Lear and Cordelia walking together to prison surrounded by their captors. Cordelia fears what lies ahead, but Lear comforts her with the words: "Come, let's away to prison./ We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage./… So well live,/And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/At gilded butterflies…." In his notebook on filming *Lear,* Kozintsev made an entry in 1969 that reveals a link between this scene and a specific memory of the war.

> The children's doctor, teacher, and writer Ianus Korchak, refusing to capitulate, perished in the gas oven of the Treblinka death camp. He went to his death with the children, composing a fairy tale for them so that they would not understand where they were being led. I often recall the memory of Korchak during this production.[21]

In Kozintsev's work, the theme of war has a much broader application than it does, say, in Klimov's *Come and See,* the subject of which, as mentioned earlier, is the Second World War and Nazi atrocities shown in graphic detail. However, Kozintsev's concern is the same as Klimov's, as Klimov expressed it:

> The terrible lessons of history must not be forgotten…. I think that art, to the full extent of its power, has to manifest and affirm man's higher consciousness that daily life causes to dim. Our film is one such effort to draw the viewer out of his self-complacency and make him sense his complicity in history for the fate of which he must be responsible.[22]

For Kozintsev, however, the path was different. He chose Shakespeare as the vehicle for his *agitka*.[23] Having directed *Lear* in

1941 at the Bol'shoi Dramaticheskii Teatr in Leningrad, Kozintsev returned to Shakespeare in the early fifties, preparing *Hamlet* for Leningrad's Pushkin Theatre. He writes in *Glubokii ekran* that he had tired not of films and filmmaking, but of the official demands made of him and their detrimental effect on his completed work. His screenplay on Karl Marx, his films *Simple People* (completed in 1945, released in 1956), *Pirogov* (1947) and *Belinsky* (1951) were stripped of Kozintsev's essential poetic idea and rendered worthless by the official demands for endless corrections and reworking. The forties and early fifties were a period when films were not so much made as they were remade. He no longer had the strength to take such journeys. During this respite, he writes that

> no one was looking over my shoulder any more. Did I put in the correction? Did I understand, at last, what they wanted from me? I myself was making the demands…. Alone, I felt a link with a great many people. I worked together with them and, consequently, for them. For them, I would present an "agitka".[24]

In this state of mind, he came to the poetic idea of both his 1954 stage production and the 1964 film of *Hamlet*. He writes:

> The responsibility of man for mankind, the irreconcilability of truth and falsehood. After the war all of this again became clear. The time had come for a clear propaganda on behalf of conscience, for the defense of human dignity against everything that humiliates man. I simply had to undertake agitka once again. And I found it. It was composed three and one half centuries ago and is called *Hamlet*. In my view, at this particular moment its time has come again.[25]

There are especially powerful associations that accompany Kozintsev's productions of *Hamlet* and *Lear* on the stage and on film. Perhaps more so for him than for the viewer; nevertheless, as part of the composite force generating the visual images of Shakespeare for Kozintsev, they are significant. Just before Hitler attacked in June of 1941, the final curtain came down on Kozintsev's production of *King Lear* at the Leningrad Bol'shoi

Dramaticheskii Teatr. During Leningrad's darkest days there was a revival of Kozintsev's *Lear*. Kozintsev recalls:

> During the blockade the theatre revived the production. At a difficult moment, Shakespeare was with the people. On the street shells were exploding; frequently the audience and the actors had to leave for the bomb shelter, but all the same the performances went on. Only a few instruments played the music of Shostakovich, a part of the set burned up.... On the street there was fire and iron. The theatre shook from the explosions. The old king cursed injustice: he demanded that inhumanity be condemned.[26]

And Jan Kott reminds us that Smoktunovsky, the young actor whom, originally, critics considered to be a poor choice by Kozintsev for Hamlet, symbolized the subtext of the film and was someone with whom the people could relate in the memory of their own experiences of the war. Smoktunovsky was captured by the Germans, imprisoned by Stalin when he was repatriated, then freed by Khrushchev. "The man playing Hamlet", Kott writes, "... was one of those released millions.... The audience knew it was watching one of its own...."[27] Like so many others, he had drunk deeply of the bitter experience of the war.

When he made his last two films, *Hamlet* and *King Lear,* Kozintsev had arrived at the final phase of his journey as an artist. At 18 he had discovered that the camera must have the natural movement of the human eye; at 22 he was preoccupied with the specifics of the cinema—style, genre and the actor; at 30 he focused on the poetic idea as the essence of cinema; from 50 on, he sought truth as his hero.[28]

His writing, particularly from this last period to the end of his life, reveals a keen critical mind whose depth of perception and understanding of the cinema, of Shakespeare, of the heart of Russian nineteenth-century culture, and of the interconnectedness of the various arts are quite impressive. Chiefly under the tutelage of Dostoevsky and Russian culture of the nineteenth century, in general, with its heavy emphasis on conscience, with the all-encompassing enormity of its spiritual worlds and its sense of commitment and responsibility for the deeply wounded human spirit, Kozintsev created these two lyrical critically acclaimed films.[29]

The truth of these films is the knowledge that mankind had once again discovered about itself, particularly, through its experiences of the trauma of the Second World War and fascism. The rediscovery of this truth is made possible in the films by the approach Kozintsev takes to the work of Shakespeare. The filmmaker perceives Shakespeare as a contemporary reminding modern man of the well-known truths about humanity that man is fated to forget generation after generation. Kozintsev writes in *Our Contemporary William Shakespeare:*

> Shakespeare's words still ring, resonant and full. His verse is still blistering its hands today. People are improved and cleansed by the poetry, their hearts penetrated by its warmth, their consciences stirred by its noble anger. In Shakespeare's tragedies, they discover the unmasked face of Virtue and of Scorn. His plays seem to be written by someone close to us, by a man of our time.[30]

With the same understanding of his work as Dostoevsky had when he wrote that "Mir spaset krasota" ("Beauty will save the world"), Kozintsev sensed the urgent need for an art that would again lead man to face the accursed questions *(prokliatye voprosy)* of existence. The experiences of humanity during the last fifty years alone make such art more expedient than ever. As Kozintsev wrote:

> The time has come for another cinema. People have lived through too much not to dwell on the most trying *(slozhnye)* questions. The magnitude of the concepts of justice, of truth, and of mercy again compels generations. A new age fills these concepts with a new vital meaning: one must never forget Auschwitz, racism, Hiroshima, or the cult of the bestial in man. The forms change, but the essence of the questions which were once called eternal, again rings contemporary. The very life of mankind is a struggle to find the answer to such questions.[31]

NOTES

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1 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
2 "Cherty vremeni", *Iskusstvo kino,* December 1985, p. 50.
3 Grigori Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh,* ed. V.G. Kozintseva and Ia.L.Butovskii, Vol. 4 (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1984), p. 305.
4 ibid., p. 438.
5 ibid., p. 57.
6 ibid., p. 296.
7 Iurii Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema,* trans. Mark E.Suino (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1981), pp. 37–9.
8 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh,* Vol. 3, p. 347.
9 ibid., Vol. 3, pp. 348–9.
10 ibid., Vol. 3, p. 428.
11 ibid., Vol. 4, p. 382. Completed in 1824 by A.S.Griboedov, *The Misfortune of Thought* is a classic of the Russian theater.
12 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh,* Vol. 4, p. 472.
13 ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 446, 447.
14 ibid., Vol. 1, p. 345.
15 ibid., Vol. 4, p. 487.
16 Fedor M.Dostoevskii, *Notes from the Underground,* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Dell, 1960), p. 54.
17 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh,* Vol. 4, p. 129.
18 ibid., Vol. 1, p. 238.
19 ibid., Vol. 4, p. 129.
20 ibid., pp. 25–6.
21 ibid., p. 317.
22 Elem Klimov, "Govoriat laureaty kinosmotra", *Iskusstvo kino,* December 1985, p. 38.
23 Used by the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, *agitka* is a political term referring to a particular, almost evangelical form of propaganda and activity designed to "agitate" or arouse and activate the self-less political sense of the masses in the creation of the new socialist order. When Kozintsev began his career in the early twenties, one of his first assignments as an artist was to join the staff of one of the *teplushki,* which were heated trains that traversed the country to convert and "agitate" the masses using art. His task was to apply his talent as a painter to the work of political indoctrination and propaganda. Clearly, by his use of the term in this later context, Kozintsev transcends its earlier limitations while retaining the distinct taste of its revolutionary fervor.
24 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh,* Vol. 1, p. 235.

25 ibid., Vol. 1, p. 237.
26 ibid., pp. 243–4.
27 Jan Kott, "On Kozintsev's Hamlet", *Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing*, vol. 22 (1979), p. 404.
28 Kozintsev, *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh*, Vol. 4, p. 373.
29 ibid., Vol. 4, p. 487.
30 ibid., Vol. 3, p. 182.
31 ibid., Vol. 1, p. 237.

CHAPTER 10
The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Cinema

FRANÇOISE NAVAILH

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 proclaimed the full liberation of women and granted them equal political and civil rights. For several decades, the Soviet Union claimed that the "woman question" had been finally solved. By the mid-1960s, however, the question of women's rôles emerged once again as a subject of serious public discussion. A growing array of scholarly studies by economists, sociologists and demographers began to document in some detail a long list of problems. The heavy and conflicting demands of women's dual rôles appear as a major locus of female dissatisfaction. The tensions it creates receive direct expression in contemporary Soviet fiction. Natalia Baranskaia's evocation of "A week like any other"[1] in the harried life of a young Soviet wife and mother captures the findings of innumerable surveys in one dramatic image.

What is the rôle of cinema in this debate?

As early as the era of the silent cinema, important filmmakers such as Ermler, Room or Barnet dealt with the status of the new woman liberated by the Revolution. Since then, the country has changed. The extremist avant-garde vanished and woman lost her importance as an innovator on the screen.

Then from the early seventies a new genre made its way on to the Soviet screen: *zhenskie fil'my,* or films about women, their problems, and their relationships with men. The first example of the "feminine" tendency is *The Old Walls* (V.Tregubovich, 1973).[2] Those *zhenskie fil'my* are very popular and seem to reflect both public demands and official policies. Despite the imposition of socialist realism, they show what society admits about itself and what it fails to admit, as well as revealing the moral and ideological values they convey and the social impact of the message on the masses. Finally, it is among such films that the greatest box-

office successes in the last decade can be found—the so-called *kassovye fil'my,* or "bestsellery".

This paper aims to define the image of woman in contemporary Soviet cinema by examining four representative films. I have thoroughly explored the entire production of the past fifteen years, and the following narrowly focused study of themes and situations justifies the choice of this limited corpus. The films in question are:

(1) *May I Have the Floor* (G.Panfilov, 1976), which, by giving a portrait of a woman mayor, indulges in polemics with Stalinist cinema of the 1930s;
(2) *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (L.Gogoberidze, 1978), on the life of a female reporter;
(3) the well-known *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (V. Menshov, 1979), which takes up the theme of the film *The Old Walls* and has also been the model for numerous remakes that were more or less successful;
(4) finally, *The Guys!* (I.Babich, 1981), examined here because it presents a very strong image of man, a sort of alternative to *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*.

I have chosen to focus on three Russian films and one Georgian film because the RSFSR releases 52 percent of the annual Soviet film production and the Russian way of life has made its way into the other fourteen republics.

Let us first give a profile of this woman featured in these films. She lives in a fairly important town, or even a capital (Moscow, Tbilisi). She is about 35 years old, slim and elegantly dressed. Her job is very absorbing and may involve major responsibilities: she is the manager of an industrial complex in *Moscow,* a woman mayor in *May I Have the Floor*. She feels integrated into a society whose values she has internalized. She is never an outcast or an eccentric. One can say she has been successful. The simple female factory worker becomes a manager *(Moscow),* the ordinary militant a mayor *(May I Have the Floor),* the poor orphan girl a journalist *(Some Interviews)*. But this social rise is not explicitly shown. It is simply mentioned or alluded to through a swift flashback. The film is meant to show *where* woman has got to, but not *how* she has got there. In this respect, one can but marvel at the ellipsis in *Moscow*. In the first part, set in 1957, she is a factory worker. Then she goes to bed, winds up the alarmclock and wakes up…in 1978! This is

the beginning of the second part in which she is a manager. It is both an instantaneous and a painless jump in time and hierarchy.

Thus, the woman has reached a satisfactory social level, and she stops going forward. As for her private life, she is married with two children—a boy and a girl *(May I Have the Floor, Some Interviews)*—or she is an unmarried mother with a daughter *(Moscow);* both situations are equally common. She likes her job, she has a respectable private life. What else could she ask for?

But we soon learn that her equanimity often conceals a painful youth, the cause of which may be personal—in *Moscow,* Katia is seduced and abandoned while pregnant (the most frequent case)—or historical—Sofiko's mother is arrested during the Purges in *Some Interviews* (war is more frequently used). Overcoming the trauma, she has found a certain balance. But right in the prime of life a major crisis arises and disturbs her well-ordered life. In general, it comes from the eruption of a belated love-feeling for a man socially inferior *(Moscow)*. The shock is more serious for Sofiko in *Some Interviews* as she discovers that her husband is unfaithful to her. A real tragedy crushes Uvarova in *May I Have the Floor,* her son is killed in an accident. The films are all constructed around such a crisis, showing its repercussions. The event not only distresses the heroine deeply, but also shatters the family structure. The case of Tonia in *Moscow*—a simple peasant happy in her marriage, the mother of *three* children,[3] and glad with her lot—is exceptional. The public takes her balanced character, which is rare in films, as an ideal vision. As a matter of fact, the Soviet family seems fragile: unhappy marriages and broken families with deserted mothers are numerous.

But, even if the father is present, the contact remains limited. As one Muscovite put it, "Fathers don't have children!"[4] In *Some Interviews,* for example, as Sofiko is playing with the children, her husband is shown looking at them through the glass door, cut off from them but visible, at once present and absent. Obviously the home exists thanks to the woman, and she alone gives life to it—witness the morning scene where Sofiko, the first person to get up, wakes up husband and children drawing back the curtains: she gives birth to life and light. By her double function of domestic angel and female worker, the woman is a link between the inside and the outside worlds. The husband does not take part in household chores, and as he is hardly ever shown at work he seems to have but little place in his wife's busy life.

But does her job make her entirely happy? And what is its part in the story-line? We notice at once that the heroine is scarcely shown at work. In *Moscow* Katia's competence as a factory manager and as a member of the Moscow Soviet is affirmed but not demonstrated as she is hardly ever shown at the factory. On the other hand, the woman mayor in *May I Have the Floor* is presented in some detail in her capacity of manager: meetings, inaugurations, decisions, inspections and so on. But she has to limit herself to administering the legacy of the previous mayor. Her own initiatives are checked, with the real decisions taken at a higher level where women are scarce.[5] She is denied judiciary support: the play that she bans in her town will be shown in Moscow, and her project for the building of a bridge to develop the town is postponed indefinitely. It is impossible not to mention *Member of the Government* (I.Kheifits and A.Zarkhi, 1940), *the* film about the Soviet liberated woman. It tells the story of a simple countrywoman, Aleksandra Sokolova, who becomes chairman of a kolkhoz and then deputy to the Supreme Soviet with the friendly help of the Party. *May I Have the Floor* openly runs counter to *Member of the Government* from which the later film takes up several sequences. *Member of the Government* ends on the enthusiastic speech of Sokolova from the rostrum of the Kremlin. *May I Have the Floor* opens and closes on Uvarova lost in the crowd of the deputies at the session of the Supreme Soviet.[6] Doubts and the feeling of powerlessness have replaced optimistic and triumphant visions. Uvarova, the spiritual daughter of Sokolova, timidly asks to express herself. Will she be able to? The film does not say. In any case, the promotion of women through politics demanded and exalted in *Member of the Government* seems frozen in *May I Have the Floor*.

We follow Sofiko *(Some Interviews)* in her various investigations of other women. She puts all her energies into her work but reaps only poor rewards: she is given a basket of apples for having prevented a highly illegal deal that would have caused the despoilment of a school field.

Thus, in spite of her assets and goodwill, the active woman ultimately presents a less brilliant image than she did at first sight: thwarted efforts, derisory results. A disappointing job and a shattered family—such are the two main lines of those films. The deal is to succeed both in one's career and in private life. Apart from the exceptional Tonia in *Moscow,* no one reaches that goal.

As a woman said, "Women work for money, but I know a lot who would work for nothing if only they could get out of the house".[7] Both the State and the people agree on that. But work *always* clashes with sentimental and private life, which brings about disaster. In *Moscow,* Gosha leaves Katia because she is superior to him professionally. In *Some Interviews* the husband reproaches Sofiko for going out or being late. The film even questions the heroine's choice of occupation. Sofiko is offered a job—at once more stable and less absorbing—as a secretary instead of remaining a reporter in the field. By means of this offer, made by the department head, society wants priority to be given to family life. But Sofiko turns down the offer and tries to reconcile both rôles. But she fails: her husband grows distant from her and turns to a more available woman. Lastly, in *May I Have the Floor* the punishment is terrible. The director (he is also the scriptwriter) admits that Uvarova loses her son because her job takes too much of her time to the detriment of her husband and her children.[8] For Sokolova in *Member of the Government,* in contrast, politics and occupation had come unhesitatingly before family life. Better still, her husand would come back after leaving her and would be even more in love with her than before. Forty years ago woman had been rewarded because public interest had prevailed over private life. Nowadays the emancipated woman is punished for the same choice. The family must be close-knit, and the cinema defends the institution of marriage or at least the stability of the parents or parent. The unmarried mother is not shocking if she only has one child. Two children would mean loose morals, a challenge to norms. Divorcees are wrong, and adultery is condemned. We are far from *Bed and Sofa* by A. Room (1927) where the heroine, unable to choose between her husband and her lover, finally leaves both, even though she is pregnant!

And yet, despite great efforts, one feels a lack of confidence in the concept of a stable man-woman relationship. Optimism remains moderate, the happy end hesitant and the future uncertain. Harmony between men and women seems problematic, and conflict relationships prevail. The relationships between the sexes are based on force. Kto kogo? Who is the stronger of the two? The answer can only be found after an examination of the way that men are presented in these films.

The image of man contradicts and completes that of woman. He is strong or weak according to the subject or the genre. If the

leading character of films about factories *(proizvodstvennye fil'my)* is a man, the action of the film is confined to the firm, and family life is secondary, or even nonexistent as in *The Bonus* (S. Mikael'ian, 1975), which depicts a lengthy meeting of the Party behind closed doors. In that case, man shows dynamism, courage, audacity and team spirit. Women, whether wives or colleagues, remain in the background. Man is also a strong person in films dealing with war, in which woman more often than not appears in a minor rôle as a nurse. In this kind of film one can incidentally notice that children are almost always boys taken in by soldiers: for example, in *Ivan's Childhood* (A.Tarkovsky, 1962). In short, when important things are at stake—Revolution, Motherland or Economy—man is there, and he stands alone.

But man is usually deficient within the family: he turns out to be weak, hesitant, even cowardly in his rôle of father and husband. In numerous films he is shown shirking his responsibilities, as in *Kinfolk* (N.Mikhalkov, 1981). Men move away from women: they reject fatherhood and shun marriage—as can be seen, for example, at the beginning of *Moscow* with Katia's seducer. All of Panfilov's heroines do well in life in spite of men, sometimes against them but never with them. The price of women's success is loneliness. At the age of 35 Katia has only wretched love-affairs *(Moscow)*. Sofiko's husband does not accept his wife's independence and complexity *(Some Interviews)*. As we observed earlier, she has roots: in one sequence, perched on a cart, crowned with leaves, Sofiko looks like a pagan goddess, whereas her husband recalls with nostalgia his grandfather's rustic house, destroyed long ago. He has lost the link with nature, but she has not. Likewise Katia wears, in a scene in the country, a wreath of flowers *(Moscow)*. Whereas men are generally presented as city-dwellers, women provide a link between the city and the country.[9]

Above all, the wife surpasses her husband, or friend, professionally. Sofiko's husband has not finished his thesis, which has made him bitter *(Some Interviews)*. Uvarova's husband trains the small local football team while she was once the RSFSR champion sharpshooter *(May I Have the Floor)*. In Moscow, Katia is a manager, Gosha a metalworker. Sofiko, at one point, vainly plays the seductress to prevent her husband from leaving her. Her disguise cannot conceal her strong personality. When woman dominates, man weakens. Such a situation is felt as abnormal. It is a topsy-turvy world rendered by the confusion of genres in *Kinfolk*

where a boy has a girl's part. *Office Romance* (E.Ryazanov, 1977) is the only film apart from *Moscow* to tackle the problem of hierarchy. In this film the department head is a virago, the clerk a sheepish and awkward youth. In a key scene, they exchange sexes and rôles. And everything is back to normal. It is the Soviet version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. A whole series of recent comedies have exploited this theme. Authoritarian and brusque as she is with her subordinates, Katia in *Moscow* turns humble with her metalworker.

How can such self-effacement be justified when one is aware of the poor opinion women have of men.[10] That feeling is largely expressed in surveys, testimony and literature. From Pushkin's Tat'iana through Turgenev, Goncharov and Gorky to this very day, the strong and decisive woman serves as a literary counterpoint to vacillating and amorphous men.[11] This archetype reveals a deep-set mental structure. Oblomov, who slips away, incapable of loving Olga who loves him, "has become the symbol of unmanly, impotent and passive man".[12] Oblomov is the eternal Russian and Soviet man.

Contemporary man behaves like a whimsical teenager, indifferent to woman's troubles and griefs, passing off the burdens of parenthood on to her. The hugely successful film *Dream Flights* (R.Balaian, 1982) draws a very similar portrait of an irresponsible 40-year-old man. The positive hero has definitely changed. "For some time there had been no more heroes of action, 'virile' men capable of becoming models for teenagers," says scriptwriter V.Chernykh.[13] And so in *Moscow* we have Gosha, a strong man, responsible, thoughtful and willing to help; in short, possessing all the qualities that women ask for—witness the general enthusiasm of the feminine public. Gosha combines the workman with the intellectual. Although he is a metalworker (statistically the most common job in the Soviet Union),[14] Gosha works for a prestigious circle, researchers who say he is indispensable. The choice of actor Batalov for this character intensifies the impact; he was a workman in his first films, the ideal fiancé in *The Cranes Are Flying* (M.Kalatozov, 1957) and a likeable scientist in *Nine Days of One Year* (M.Romm, 1961). Gosha is admittedly a manual worker but not an ordinary one. He is Mr Wonderful himself! He can do everything: work, cook, box, and quote Diocletian! The perfect man, at once gentle and harsh, who respects his wife's occupation, helps her at home,[15] goes shopping with her but asserts his

leadership at home from the beginning: "Remember I will always be the one to take the decisions for the simple reason that I am a man." His quiet strength captivates Katia, her daughter, and the women in the audience. After a fight in the street he says to his future stepdaughter: "I have behaved as a normal man: protecting and deciding. You would not admire a woman because she washes and cooks." It is a real speech on the division of rôles and tasks. Considering the success of *Moscow,* women would be happy to meet such a reliable companion who would relieve them of their double burden. As a woman puts it, "Our women suffer from equality". Another says: "With emancipation we lead such abnormal, twisted lives."[16] Women are weary and want a friendly shoulder. For you men, there is business; for us women, there is emotion.

Woman is utterly dominated by her own sensitivity. And the stability of her professional life contrasts with her demanding affectivity. In *Moscow,* Katia's activity as a deputy of the Moscow Soviet consists in visiting a lonely hearts club.[17] However, marriage as a way of rising socially is out of the question. Contrarily to Western and particularly American cinema, woman cannot and must not use men. Hence the double failure in *Moscow* of Liudmila, who desperately tries to find herself a husband, and of Katia, who at the beginning of the film conceals her situation as a factory worker. When Katia's lover discovers it, he jilts her, leaving her pregnant. If in spite of everything a woman marries for money, it ends in disaster. Liudmila's husband, a brilliant hockey-player, takes to drinking and they get divorced. The active woman, very or too resourceful, now becomes a negative figure. The actress Alentova—Katia in *Moscow*—has become in *Time of Desire* (Iu. Raisman, 1984) an unlikeable woman of unscrupulous ambition. The cinema of the early 1980s presents a new type of woman affected by the fever of acquisition, by the so-called *veshchizm.*[18]

Woman is subjected to the crisis which man prompts and solves with more or less delicacy. This occurs on two occasions in *Moscow* (her seducer and Gosha). Emotionally she depends on *him.* The story evolves in accordance with his attitude, and the loss of her lover plunges her into a state of utter helplessness, whereas man accepts his personal failure more easily. And, once again, it is possible for a cinema hero to have an existence that is defined only through his job, whereas the heroine is bound to be involved in

love-relationships. Active in her job, woman is passive in love, She wants man to take the initiative. In the whole collection of characters in *Some Interviews* there is only one really independent woman, a deliberately unmarried mother. But, once again, it is a case of autonomy in solitude. In the face of a situation where women reject men who have been reduced to mere breeders (suggested in many films where women eventually come to appreciate their solitude), there is a new attempt to reassert the value of man within the family. Mainly as a father.

The Guys! (I.Babich, 1981) claims to be a variant of *Moscow,* with the leading character, Pavel Zubov, an emulation of Gosha. In fact, the film settles the questions raised in *Moscow, Some Interviews* and *May I Have the Floor* on the respective places of family and work.

Thus Pavel Zubov had earlier left his girlfriend who had been slandered by his mother. The character of a possessive mother, hostile to her son's love-affairs, often appears in the films, especially in those dealing with teenagers' thwarted first loves. In contrast to that negative image, we are given the good mother, the deserted girlfriend. Pavel did not know that she was pregnant.[19] She brings up her daughter without resentment, gets married to give her a father—always that idea of family—as well as two brothers. Then she dies, tender and gentle. Her daughter, the living image of her mother, succeeds her. She is always shown busy with the housework and she is ready to give up her studies, and consequently her future occupation, in order to keep the house. Lastly, she has all the traditional qualities of the Russian woman: self-denial, sweetness, generosity, modesty. Here the father-daughter relationship replaces the husband-wife duo. The confusion of rôles is complete. The woman is at once daughter, sister, wife and mother not successively but simultaneously.[20] Authority prevails over equality.

That sort of woman could be found before, especially in historical films that present the traditional patriarchal society. An example is the archetypal behavior of the Decembrists' wives who follow their husbands to Siberia not out of political conviction or out of love but from a sense of duty—as is clear from the dialogue in *The Star of Enchanting Happiness* (V.Motyl', 1975), a film released in the middle of International Women's Year. In that context, the wife devotes herself to her husband and the mother to her son. Whether she is renowned like tsarina Natal'ia in *Peter's*

Youth (S.Gerasimov, 1981) or anonymous like the teenager in *Lenin in Paris* (S.Yutkevich, 1981) who is shown laying a wreath at the Mausoleum while a voice offscreen predicts: "Do you want your *son* [italics mine: this child is hypothetical, and *a fortiori* its sex] to live in a land of freedom?" And in this connection it is useful to study the image of women in films on Lenin, in the so-called *Leniniana,* where beside the Mother *par excellence,* a kind of lay Virgin Mary, stands the faithful Krupskaia, who is more like a model secretary than a revolutionary or beloved wife. Woman is loyal instead of equal. And the life of the Great Man is presented as the absolute model from childhood onwards.

Hence the very negative reactions of the public to the character of Tania in *A Lover's Romance* (A.Konchalovsky, 1975). Desperate after the death of her boyfriend during his military service, Tania eventually overcomes her grief and gets married. As far as the public is concerned, she should have waited for him even beyond all hope.[21] In *Asya's Happiness* (1966) by the same Konchalovsky, Asya has two lovers. Learning she is pregnant but not knowing which man is the father, she refuses to get married and claims that she will live her life alone. The situation is inspired by *Bed and Sofa,* according to the usual principle of quotation in the Soviet cinema. This act of freedom, along with the too realistic picture of a kolkhoz background, accounts for the ban placed on the film. It has not been released until 1987.

Films produced in the Central Asian republics show a similar pattern. Numerous films deal with the first women fighting for emancipation in the Muslim countries, often repeating the formula of *Member of the Government.* They die tragically whereas the 1939 heroine, also the victim of a murder attempt by a wicked kulak, was only injured. The message has changed. Instead of "Women, take your destiny into your hands!" the new slogan is "Women, without the couple there is no salvation!"

How things have evolved! Until the end of the 1930s, until the war, woman created the family and often dragged man toward the new society. Man followed, sometimes even accepted another man's child (*Katka the Appleseller* by F.Ermler, 1926). But between Moscow and *The Guys!* there is a gap. In *Moscow,* Gosha eventually comes back to Katia, admitting her superior position at work while asserting his leadership at home over Katia and her daughter. He comes back out of love, he behaves only like a father. He also re-creates a family by taking back his daughter with

her two half-brothers, but after the sacrifice of his own personal happiness: his girlfriend leaves him because she refuses to take care of his children. Those are two ideal visions of men, far from reality where man rejects both burdens of father and husband.[22] But the *Moscow* version treats woman as a partner, while *The Guys!* relegates her to the position of a young girl. Man is reestablished in his position of almighty and exemplary patriarch. The film had tremendous repercussions. For the first time, many men wrote to the popular journal *Sovetskii ekran* confessing that they, too, had abandoned their wives and children and that they had done so voluntarily.[23] The film absolves, linking Pavel Zubov to the myth of the Good Father which dominated Russian and Soviet society from Peter the Great to Stalin. It shouldn't be forgotten that Lenin, the founding father of the present political system, is called *rodnoi*.

What is the value of the proposed model?

Gosha embodies the myth, now turned cliché, of the "second chance" for lonely 35-year-old women. In fact everyone knows that "for a woman with children it's difficult to find someone to marry, especially if she's a bit on in years, that is to say when she's around thirty-five to forty".[24] All the more so since there are charming Bachelors" of 40 and over while in this age-group the shortage of men is more acute. And the public knows that Gosha is an inaccessible dream.[25] *Moscow* is entertainment and escapism. It is Hollywood at its best. The story of the three provincial girls who arrive in Moscow in 1957 to succeed reminds one of the American Gold Diggers of the 1930s. The convergence was recognized when the film was awarded the Oscar for the best foreign film in 1981: "Hollywood honored what it loved best—its own formulas."[26] The scriptwriter himself, V.Chernykh, has admitted this: "Actually the American and Soviet cinemas are very dose. They both exalt their country, spread propaganda in fact. Each one considers his system as the best one possible, in spite of all its defects."[27]

The society depicted does in fact seem to offer every possibility for social promotion. *Moscow* is a typical success-story. The little female factory worker becomes the manager of a big factory. But this upward mobility is possible mainly in the economic sector. Politics leads to deadlock *(May I Have the Floor)*. The more Uvarova conforms to norms, and the more she behaves like Sokolova in *Member of the Government,* the more she fails. Sokolova had gained on three levels: knowledge (illiterate at first,

she educated herself), power (a former exploited peasant woman, she became a deputy) and family (her husband beats her at the beginning, but soon comes to respect her). Uvarova loses on the same levels. Her native abilities receive no development, her public initiatives are thwarted and her family breaks up.

This is so because work is not sufficient, even though the principle of work for woman is never questioned. One's family must not be neglected. Here, woman either accepts to step back or she is punished. In *Moscow,* Katia gets Gosha back because she submits. In the last sequence, he asks for the soup. Katia humbly waits on him and watches him eating, lost in admiration. Sofiko's husband leaves her *(Some Interviews)*. Uvarova's life is a complete failure *(May I Have the Floor)*. At the end of the films, the family is together again or must be together around the father, otherwise the family breaks up and the woman is blamed for it.

Woman's double day is sometimes shown on the screen. Most clearly in *Some Interviews* where an important scene takes place in the kitchen. They discuss a fundamental problem as she is preparing the meal. And his immobility contrasts with her feverish agitation. But the heroine does not question her double burden, she does not rebel. The difference is clear. The ideal city-dweller, Gosha, helps with the household chores *(Moscow),* but Pavel Zubov, the model father like his own kolkhoz father, does not *(The Guys!)*. Pavel's mother is always busy in the kitchen, his daughter as well.[28] Gosha stands for the Soviet man of tomorrow—if Soviet males agree to change—whereas Pavel Zubov embodies the Russian man of yesterday, today and tomorrow—if things remain as they are.

The present situation, at all levels and in all fields (men rule the State, the factory; women comply),[29] is the result of a certain evolution in time. The films on the Revolution or the war show a revealing change in the rôles given to women. The letdown of the Amazons is obvious. From combatants they have become secretaries, nurses or translators; that is to say, they pass on decisions but do not decide themselves. We can compare *The New Babylon* (G.Kozintsev and L.Trauberg, 1929), the splendid description of a bold female Communard, to *Lenin in Paris; She Defends the Motherland* (F.Ermler, 1943), where comrade Praskov'ia takes up arms, to *Teheran-43* (N.Alov and B.Naumov, 1981), where the heroine is a victim buffeted about by history. The career of the actress Vera Maretskaia exemplifies this evolution.

She played in *The House on Trubnaia Square* (R.Barnet, 1927) where she depicted the sudden awareness of a proletarian woman, in *Member of the Government* (1940) where she was the peasant woman turned deputy, in *She Defends the Motherland* (1943) where she played the heroic countrywoman, and lastly in *Mother* (M.Donskoi, 1955), which involved politicization out of mere filial love. From now on woman cannot come to power any more, since power legitimately belongs to man. Hence the difficulties that director Panfilov has met with for nearly twenty years in carrying out his film on Joan of Arc. He is always giving lame excuses—the French are alleged to have refused to allow him to deal with their national heroine. Is it not rather the scandal of a woman—and, what is more, a humble peasant woman—who commands an army and saves her country? Likewise, Peter the Great is regularly glorified whereas his exact feminine counter-part, Catherine the Great, remains out of the spotlight.

What conclusion should be drawn from this short survey?

First, the gradual eclipse of woman. The films of the past gave greater importance to the Soviet female citizen, a self-confident and fervent communist. The films depicted her evolution. An unmarried woman between 20 and 25 years old, she was trying to find her place in society and was fighting for her independence. The optimistic ending emphasized her dynamism and her efficient vitality. The films of today are characterized by a lack of assurance, and by a crisis situation. Woman has become a wounded soul with little ambition, given to passivity, and dominated by her love-life. [30] It is man who breaks her routine and creates movement. The endings remain open or else the woman's failures are punished. Her energies are wasted away. The film titles and dialogues dealing with belated love emphasize loneliness, sadness and a wealth of squandered affection. She is the resigned and passive subject of events—she does not prompt them or influence them. All things considered, the dominant trait of the quiet and ideal Tania *(Moscow)* is a total lack of ambition.

On the whole, the range of women's occupations is limited. Prestigious jobs come first. A woman would rather be the manager of an industrial complex than a factory worker, a kolkhoz laborer, a doctor or a shop assistant.[31] Through her job and a proper age-bracket, the heroine has everything: an established position, well-behaved children, smart clothes that are obviously foreign, rich-looking furniture, a pleasant flat.[32] Women under 35 are not well

represented in films. In fact the age-bracket between 25 and 35 is deliberately avoided—this includes young people and newly-weds who are trying to settle down and have to cope with countless difficulties. In films, everyday life presents no particular problem—while we know for a fact that daily queues, lack of merchandise, severe shortages and irregularities in the supply of consumer goods and services, insufficient domestic appliances, childcare problems, financial difficulties, and the promiscuity caused by cramped lodgings make life a nightmare, especially the life of women. "I don't feel any joy in just being alive," acknowledges a woman.[33] All those problems, well rendered in Baranskaia's short story, are evaded in films.[34]

To those omitted difficulties is added the sexual taboo. Stalinist puritanism still pervades the Soviet society ,[35] The cinema presents asexual beings. Director Panfilov complained about this with respect to *May I Have the Floor*. "I would have liked to deal with the love scenes more openly, with the freedom that Bergman has but to which I am not entitled."[36] The rare naked bodies of women, as in *Andrei Rublev* (A.Tarkovsky, 1967) or *The Kindergarten* (E. Yevtushenko, 1983), express the de-eroticization of woman, rather than sensuality, assimilating woman to the Earth/Nature, rather than to pleasure. This apparent prudishness contrasts with the ordinary language and sexual habits which are very crude.[37] It is also a way of eluding the problem of abortion, the most commonly used method of birth control, something that is part of woman's daily life. Women live in constant fear of becoming pregnant.[38]

Understandably, in spite of an abundant production of films (some 150 per year), the cinema does not exhaust the subject of women. But there are significant deficiencies and distortions. The public is shown an embellished picture of society with occasional application of the famous high-gloss polish that used to be called *lakirovka deistvitel'nosti* in the 1950s.

But, as usual in the Soviet Union, one must read between the lines. Faction attempts to propagate official mythology, at the same time reporting on the state and mood of the populace. Though it may appear in sketchy ways, reality does ultimately come to the surface. Some details, figures and episodes look right within a touched-up whole. An example is the very brief scene in *A Personal Opinion* (Iu. Karasik, 1976) where a female worker, no longer young but stout and dowdy, tearfully explains the reasons

for her resignation: the exhausting work at the factory, the load of household chores, and the fear that her husband may leave her because, when evening comes, she is so tired that she immediately falls asleep. The whole condition of Soviet women is summed up in this scene. Minor rôles are often more genuine than the leading rôles. *Moscow* re veals the guilt feelings of the Soviets toward sex. Gosha leaves and Katia hurriedly makes up the bed before her daughter comes back home. She feels embarrassed though she is nearly 40 years old! If the heroine of Panfilov's *Valentina* (1981) is much too literary, her rape during a dance (the rape is only suggested) corresponds exactly to the actual news items found in the press.[39]

Another way of dealing with facts is to shift them in time, and to change the context. For example, to see a real contemporary communal apartment—and they continue to be home to almost a quarter of all Soviet urban families today—one has to fall back on *Five Evenings* (N.Mihalkov, 1978) which is set in 1957, or on L. Gaydai's comedies which take place during the NEP period! The same is true of marriages of convenience arranged in order to get the notorious residence permit *(propiska)*. This is described in *Marriage of Convenience* (A.Mkrohian, 1986), a film about the Second World War, while this phenomenon is now so common that it is mentioned in a special article (S15) of the Family Code.

In spite of all these deficiencies and distortions, there is still more truth in most films than in all the collection of *Pravda* with its shock workers and Stakhanovites. For the cinema shows that work in the Soviet Union is not fully satisfying and that Soviet people crave happiness. Most films show that women cannot find bliss either at work or within the family—and that men give up. United families and harmonious couples can be found on the screen only in exceptional cases.

The conflict relationships that are shown, toned down though they are, correspond to reality. This is also true of the embarrassment in talking about intimate matters, doubt, discouragement, and regret at women's thwarted or wasted feelings and useless love. In short, a situation of failure lived out in resignation and even fatalism. "We don't think we can do anything about these problems. We can recognize them and perhaps discuss them, but we can't do anything. Change can only come from the top."[40] Maybe if there were more Goshas in reality *(Moscow)*, if men's behavior were more mature, women would stop voicing this

gnawing exasperation, this rejection of men that fosters antagonism between the sexes, each blaming the other for his or her difficulties. To solve the crisis, *Moscow* suggests mutual respect and help. It is still sheer Utopianism. *Some Interviews* and *May I Have the Floor* show the present deadlock. *The Guys!* reasserts the value of man in all rôles except that of husband, with the concomitant submission of the woman—a return to traditional rural values and a patriarchal system,[41] a return which had already taken place in the 1930s. This definition of femininity was conveyed in the speech of a Soviet fictional heroine on a visit to the Kremlin in 1937.

"A wife should also be a happy mother and create a serene home atmosphere, without, however, abandoning work for the common welfare. She should know how to combine all these things while also matching her husband's performance on the job."

"Right!" said Stalin.[42]

In the world of cinema, the turning-point was *Member of the Government,* a film which modified the image of the emancipated woman by making her a 30–40-year-old wife, mother, and a working woman compelled to cope with her manifold duties, with the blessing of the Party.

This pattern corresponds to men's wishes.[43] For women, it means the denial of their conflict with men. But it is clear that the balancing of work and family rôles is a central problem in the lives of Soviet women. The expulsion in 1980 from the Soviet Union of the four founding editors of the first feminist journal is a dramatic revelation of official sensitivities.

Through the image of woman, inadequate and distorted though it is, contemporary Soviet cinema bears witness to this acute unease. Instead of the positive exemplary hero of yesterday, too monolithic and unequivocal, Soviet cinema is now required to show exemplary crises with complex heroes. The films on women, the *zhenskie fil'my,* also reveal a fundamental change in the educational and cultural rôle of the cinema in the Soviet Union.

LIST OF FILMS

Katka the Appleseller (Kat'ka bumazhnyi ranet): F.Ermler and E. Johanson (1926/Sovkino)

Bed and Sofa (Tret'ia Meshchanskaia): A.Room (1927/Sovkino)

The House on Trubnaia Square (Dom na Trubnoi): B.Barnet (1927/ Mezhrabprom-Rus')

The New Babylon (Novyi Vavilon): G.Kozintsev and L.Trauberg (1929/ Sovkino)

Member of the Government/The Great Beginning/(Chlen praviltel'stva): I.Heifetz and A.Zarkhi (1939/Lenfilm)

She Defends Her Homeland (Ona zashchishchaet Rodinu): F.Ermler (1943/Coks. Alma-Ata)

Mother (Mat'): M.Donskoi (1955/Kievfil'm)

The Cranes are Flying (Letiat zhuravli): M.Kalatozov (1957/ Mosfilm)

Nine Days in One Year (Deviat' dnei odnogo goda): M.Romm (1961/ Mosfilm)

Ivan's Childhood (Ivanovo destvo): A.Tarkovsky (1962/ Mosfilm)

Asya's Happiness (Asino schast'e): A.Konchalovsky (1966/ Mosfilm)

Andrei Rublev (Andrei Rublev): A.Tarkovsky (1967/Mosfilm)

The Old Walls (Starye steny): V.Tregubovich (1973/Lenfilm)

The Mirror (Zerkalo): A.Tarkovsky (1974/Mosfilm)

The Bonus (Premiia): S.Mikael'ian (1975/Lenfilm)

A Lover's Romance (Romans o vliublennykh): A.Konchalovsky (1975/ Mosfilm)

The Star of Enchanting Happiness (Zvezda plertitel'nogo schast'ia): V. Motyl (1975/Lenfilm)

May I Have the Floor (Proshu slovo): G.Panfilov (1976/Lenfilm)

A Personal Opinion (Sobstvennoe mnenie): Iu.Karasik (1976/ Mosfilm)

Office Romance (Sluzhebnyi roman): E.Riazanov (1977/ Mosfilm)

Some Interviews on Personal Matters (Neskol'ko interv'iu po lichnym voprosam): L.Gogoberidze (1978/Gruziafilm)

Five Evenings (Pjat' vecherov): N.Mikhalkov (1979/Mosfilm)

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (Moskva slezam ne verit): V.Menshov (1979/Mosfilm)

The Guys!(Muzhiki!): I.Babich (1981/Mosfilm)

Kinfolk (Rodnia): N.Mikhalkov (1981/Mosfilm)

Lenin in Paris (Lenin vParizhe): S.Yutkevich (1981/Mosfilm)

Peter's Youth (Iunost' Petra): S.Gerasimov (1981/Mosfilm)

Teheran-43 (Tegeran-43): N.Alov and B.Naumov (1981/ Mosfilm)

Valentina (Valentina): G.Panfilov (1981/Lenfilm)

Dream Flights (Polety vo sne i naiavu): R.Balaian (1982/Kinostudiia A. Dovzhenko)

The Kindergarten (Detskii sad): E.Evtushenko (1983/Mosfilm)

Scarecrow (Chuchelo): R.Bykov (1983/Mosfilm)

Time of Desires (Vremia zhelanii): Iu. Raizman (1984/Mosfilm)

Marriage of Convenience (Zakonnyi brak): A.Mkrchian (1986/Mosfilm)

NOTES

1 A short story by N.Baranskaia, "Nedelia kak nedelia", in *Novyi Mir,* no. 11 (1969), pp. 23–55.

2 See list of films at the end of the article for Russian title and name of producing studio.

3 The urban Russian family typically has one child. The 1979 statistical average for the RSFSR was 3.3 persons per family. See B.Kerblay and M.Lavigne, *Les Soviétiques des années 80* (Paris: 1985), p. 186.

4 C.Hansson and K.Liden, *Moscow Women* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 149.

5 "Women are virtually absent from the upper levels of the Party apparatus itself: G.Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979), p. 217.

6 The percentage of women in the Supreme Soviet was: 24.23 percent in 1937 (A.Pierre, *Les Femmes en Union Soviétique* (Paris: Armand Colin SPES, 1960), 30.5 percent in 1970 (Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society,* p. 205), and 32.8 percent in 1985 (*Les Femmes en URSS: chiffres et faits,* Ed. Novosti, Moscow, 1985, p. 20), while women constitute about 53 percent of the total population. And the Supreme Soviet is not the equivalent of a European parliament.

7 Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women,* p. 151.

8 Interview in *Révolution,* no. 196 (2 December 1983), pp. 42–4.

9 Traditionally, woman embodies nature and earth.

10 Some female teenagers of about 14 or 15 who were asked to classify feminine qualities gave first place to "pride" and "will" and put "respect for boys" in fourteenth or fifteenth place: "Why should we respect them? They are rude and lazy." See G.Belskaia, *"Otkuda berutsia plokhie zheny?", Literaturnaia gazeta,* no. 36 (9 September 1977).

11 In the Russian tradition, both religious and secular, woman embodies positive values and the transmission of these values (see, for example, *Scarecrow* by R.Bykov, 1983).

12 M.Stern, *La Vie sexuelle en URSS* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), p. 35.
13 *Litera turnaia gazeta,* 14 September 1981.
14 The job of metalworker is rated only fifty-fifth out of eighty jobs. Scientists are at the top of the list. See B.Kerblay, *La Société soviétique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1977), pp. 220–1.
15 A Soviet woman devotes 17 percent of her time to the housework per week, a man only 8.7 percent. D.Karpokikhin and N.Kuznetsova, "Ratsional'nyi biudzhet vremeni trudiashchikhsia i problemy ego dostizheniia", *Ekonomicheskie nauki,* no. 9 (1979), pp. 51–9.
16 Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women,* pp. 24 and 52.
17 See P.Keidoshnius, "Znakomstvo po ob'iavleniia", *Literaturnaia gazeta,* no. 19 (3 March 1979).
18 Vera S.Dunham had already noted that, in literature, the "fever for possessions is a key trait of *meshchanstvo* which, in many ways in fact, is a familial and feminine affair". See Vera S.Dunham, *In Stalin's Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 19–20.
19 This ambivalence of the woman/mother corresponds to the cultural cliché which at one and the same time glorifies the mother and exposes her to abuse (see the verb *materit'sia*).
20 About *The Mirror* (1974) A.Tarkovsky stated: "I can't see the difference between the mother and the wife" (*France-URSS Magazine,* March 1978). The same actress plays both parts.
21 "More than half of the viewers who analyzed Tanya called her frivolous, not serious enough, then pointed out her inconstancy, her silliness, and some mentioned her hysterical nature": sociological survey quoted by Y.Vorontsov and I.Rachuk, *The Phenomenon of the Soviet Cinema* (Moscow: Progress, 1980), pp. 350–6.
22 See Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society,* and Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women.*
23 See, for example, *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 14 (3 April 1982).
24 Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women,* p. 171.
25 See the letters to the editor by women in *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 13 (July 1980).
26 *Newsweek,* 25 May 1981.
27 Interview conducted in Moscow in August 1981.
28 The screenwriter and producer of *Moscow* were men, whereas those of *The Guys!* were women. Might this be an example of the "misogyny" of women denounced in the *samizdat* publication *Zhenshchina i Rossiia,* the first Soviet feminist journal?
29 "The structure of authority remains hierarchical, and the proportion of women declines at successively higher levels of that hierarchy,

even in the occupations in which they predominate": Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society,* p. 197.

30 The influence of oriental—especially Indian—melodramas must not be underestimated. They are very popular with the feminine public.

31 Women constitute, respectively, 13 percent (1970), 49 percent, 44 percent, 85 percent and 76 percent (1976) of the total employment in these fields. See Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society,* pp. 184 and 172.

32 The unrealistic luxury shown in films has been denounced. See *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 3 (1986), p. 44.

33 Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women,* p. 112. See also Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society,* pp. 232–84.

34 These comments refer to films made before the *glasnost* period. More recent films display a critical treatment of the woman issue.

35 For an excellent account of this problem, see Stern, *La Vie sexuelle en URSS.*

36 Interview in *Positif,* June 1977.

37 For an excellent account of this problem, see Stern, *La Vie sexuelle en URSS.*

38 The average Soviet woman has six abortions in her lifetime (*Time,* 6 April 1981). One of the interviewed Muscovites in Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women* (p. 21) had already had seven abortions at the age of 28!

39 See the article in *Izvestiia,* "Versii i sud'by", 24 May 1983. See also V. Chalidze, *Crime in the USSR* (New York: Random House, 1977).

40 Hansson and Liden, *Moscow Women,* p. 62.

41 Pavel Zubov, the hero of *The Guys!,* is the son of a collective-farm worker. On a visit to *his native village,* he discovers that he has a 15-year-old daughter, and decides to take charge of her.

42 F.Panferov, *"Bruski",* cited in X.Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 53.

43 From a very early age children are exposed to the sex stereotyping of rôles. See M.Rosenham, "Images of male and female in Soviet children's readers", in *Women in Russia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977).

CHAPTER 11
Russian Nationalist Themes in Soviet Film of the 1970s

JOHN B.DUNLOP

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Russian nationalist tendency made its presence increasingly felt in Soviet society. In two recent books, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (1983) and *The New Russian Nationalism* (1985),[1] I showed that Russian nationalism can be seen primarily as a desire to *preserve*: to preserve ethnic Russians themselves from sociodemographic attrition (the result of such perceived plagues as the breakup of the family, plummeting birth rates, and juvenile delinquency); to preserve Russian historical monuments, especially ancient churches, from the wrecker's ball and bulldozer; to preserve the endangered Russian environment from defilement and pollution; to preserve the national religion, Russian Orthodoxy, from extinction. It also seeks to preserve the nineteenth-century Russian classics (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, etc.) from neglect, and it manifests a strong suspicion of modernization, urbanization and the so-called "scientific and technical revolution".

These fervent concerns inevitably pit Russian nationalists against the legitimizing ideology of the Soviet regime, Marxism-Leninism. To be sure, since the time of Stalin the regime has attempted to co-opt the nationalist tendency to its own purposes, but it has not ultimately been successful in this regard.[2] In many ways, Russian nationalism remains refractory and "indigestible".

Like other media of cultural expression, Soviet film has tended to mirror this powerful current of thought and sentiment. During the 1970s and 1980s one finds a number of Soviet films giving expression to the concerns, fears and hopes of the nationalists. Owing to the presence of the Soviet censorship, this expression has at times had to be quasi-Aesopian in nature. This has particularly

been the case in the treatment of such *verboten* subjects as religion.

This paper scrutinizes five Soviet films—*Snowball Berry Red* (*Kalina krasnaia,* 1974), *Siberiade* (1979), *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980), *The Mirror* (1974) and *Agony* (1975)—which are characteristic of the nationalist climate of discourse. The list far from exhausts the number of films which could be mentioned. We will not, for example, be discussing films based on the nineteenth-century Russian classics, such as Nikita Mikhalkov's *Oblomov* (1980), which seek to recapture the sights, sounds and rhythms of a society which has disappeared.

The first three films to be discussed—*Kalina krasnaia, Siberiade* and *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*—enjoyed heavy mass attendance on the part of Soviet viewers. They represent, in fact, three of the all-time box-office hits of the Soviet film industry. An examination of these films and of the reasons for their great popularity should tell us something about Soviet society of the 1970s and 1980s.

VASILII SHUKSHIN'S *KALINA KRASNAIA*

The year of Vasilii Shukshin's death, 1974, also witnessed his greatest triumph—the film *Kalina krasnaia,* which he scripted, directed, and in which as an actor he played the leading rôle. The film enjoyed almost unprecedented success among Soviet viewers; the "overwhelming majority" of the readers of the popular film magazine *Sovetskii ekran* chose it as the year's best film, and Shukshin as the year's best actor. The film elicited what one critic has called an "ocean of letters" from viewers, while Shukshin's unexpected death at the age of 45 drew 160,000 letters of commiseration.[3]

In the months prior to its release, however, it seemed that *Kalina krasnaia* might not see the light of day. As Soviet filmmaker A. Kapler has reported, the film had "serious opponents".[4] And when G.Kapralov published a laudatory review of the film in *Pravda* a number of letters arrived at the paper's editorial office expressing sharp disagreement with his positive assessment.[5] Asserting that the film would be especially harmful for Soviet youth, they demanded that it be removed from mo vie-theatres. Shukshin, according to Kapler, was also charged with such "mortal sins" as praising the countryside, disliking the city, and traditionalist

conservatism.[6] As should be evident, most of the criticism stemmed from self-styled Marxist-Leninist purists. According to former *New York Times* Moscow correspondent Hedrick Smith, it was only Brezhnev's favorable opinion of the film which led to its release.[7]

What attracted the Soviet masses to *Kalina krasnaia* in droves was the figure of its central protagonist, the deracinated peasant Egor Prokudin, played by Shukshin. To depict a criminal, especially a recidivist, in a positive light went heavily against the grain of socialist realism. True, Egor does leave his former criminal associates for the remote village of Iasnoe, moves in with spiritually healthy Russian *muzhiki,* and gives up his "urban" job of chauffeur for that of tractor driver. But flashes of his former self are repeatedly seen; the viewer witnesses a sharp struggle between the "old" and "new" Prokudin. In fact, the "old" Egor in a certain sense wins out. As Shukshin told the participants in a "round table" discussion of his film, Egor *de facto* commits suicide. "I simply lacked the boldness to do this unambiguously. …"[8] Shukshin might have added that the Soviet censorship would not have permitted him to show Egor's suicide.

In an important interview with Soviet journalist V.Fomin, conducted while he was engaged in making the film, Shukshin gave a remarkably candid account of the intentions underlying his film. What rivets his attention, he told Fomin, is the fate of the Russian peasant who has left his native village. And, referring to Egor, he commented:

> In this bitter story, what interests me is not that a man loses his way from the true path, and not man in general. What interests me is the peasant who has lost his ties to the land, to physical labor, to those roots which support life….

And he continued:

> I feel sorry for this man [Egor], sorry to the point of pain and of shuddering for his fate. If circumstances—personal, societal—had been shaped differently, he could have become an outstanding man, could have distinguished himself with good deeds…. And one so much wants to "win" Egor for life, for the viewers…. But how? How can one do this without infringing the truth of his character, of life itself?[9]

As Shukshin sees it, a Russian peasant who has been uprooted by urbanization and modernization is blocked from finding the "holiday" *(prazdnik)* and "peace" *(pokoi)* for which his soul thirsts. Like Sergei Esenin before him, Shukshin sings the tragedy of rural Russia which has been raped and defiled by the "Lord Twentieth Century".[10] The migration from the village to the city changes people, corrodes their personalities.

As the distinguished émigré critic Mikhail Heller has noted, there is a religious dimension to Shukshin's film.[11] Egor Prokudin, like the heroes of Shukshin's short stories, is an unbeliever who is "looking for faith". A white church or white birches appear on the screen each time Egor ponders the meaning of life. But Shukshin is not a believer, though he would like to be. Egor's "suicide" lends a note of pessimism and despair to the end of the film which is countered but not counterbalanced by its religiomystical groupings.

The film *Kalina krasnaia* exhibits hostility toward the ruling ideology of the Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism. At one point in the film, bored Soviet citizens are shown walking about beneath exultant political slogans. Egor uses the language of class warfare ironically in his discussion with Liuba Paikalova's parents: "Did you serve with Kolchak when you were young? In the White Guard counter-intelligence?" "Did you steal ears of grain from kolkhoz fields during the difficult years?"[12] (Shukshin's father, a Siberian peasant, was arrested by the OGPU in 1933 and perished in prison.)[13] Shukshin feels nothing but revulsion for the rhetoric of class hatred.

The tragedy of the uprooted peasant, Egor Prokudin, captured and captivated the Soviet viewing masses. As one Soviet film critic has written: "Death struck [Shukshin] at the very moment when the whole country was watching *Kalina krasnaia*."[14]

ANDREI MIKHALKOV-KONCHALOVSKY'S *SIBERIADE*[15]

Konchalovskii considers this to be his most important film.[16] It was seen by 100 million domestic viewers before it was abruptly taken off Soviet screens; according to Konchalovsky, the authorities feared he was going to defect.[17]

Siberiade recounts the history of three generations of the Ustuzhanin family, whose roots lie in the remote western Siberian village of Elan' (a word phonetically related to the Russian word

for deer, *Olen'*). The film begins in the year 1909 and concludes in the 1960s, encompassing a half-century of Russian and Soviet historical experience.

Afanasii Ustuzhanin, the grandfather, is a driven man who, to the alternating consternation and amusement of his fellow-villagers, takes upon himself the task of cutting a road through the dense, often swampy taiga surrounding Elan'. Afanasii embodies man's innate Promethean impulses; the forest moans as his skilled axe topples huge trees, while a wildcat who crosses his path is trussed up and suspended from a tree. Ustuzhanin is not an evil man, but he is driven by a compulsion to remake the earth in his own image. At the moment of his death, we see him lying drunk in the forest with his face resting on an anthill, whose denizens move across his face. The Dostoevskian anthill reference and the allusion to the Soviet plague of alcoholism will recur throughout the film.[18]

Afanasii's son, Kolia, born in 1897, is of a generation that helped make the Bolshevik revolution. While a young man, he falls in love with a fiery village girl, Anastasia Solomina—the daughter of wealthy peasants—is rejected by her (she marries another village lad, Filka, instead) and then is unexpectedly chosen again, whereupon the two flee from the village into the cauldron of war, revolution and civil war.

After several years, Kolia returns to his native village breathing the fire of revolution and social change. Since boyhood, Kolia has been swayed by the rhetoric of class hatred that favored his family, poor peasants, over such wealthy villagers as the Solomins, even though the Solomins are hardworking and disciplined. Kolia comes back to the village without his wife, who perished in the civil war-White Cossacks doused her with alcohol and set her on fire—but accompanied by his young son, Alesha, a revolutionary fanatic. With Kolia's arrival, the flames of discord begin to race through the previously peaceful settlement. Ideology, *Siberiade* shows, poisons human relations, which are difficult enough without it.

Throughout *Siberiade,* the natural life of the isolated village, frozen in time, has been contrasted with the cacophonous rush of events in the world outside. Employing black-and-white documentary footage, speeded up to catch the headlong pace of events, the film offers us snatches of the First World War, of Lenin orating to the masses, of revolution and civil war, and of Stalin's sinister rise to power. Men are depicted rushing about frantically

like the swarming ants that covered Afanasii Ustuzhanin's face at the moment of his death. And always there are explosions. At the beginning of the film, we are shown a Siberian revolutionary who passes through the village of Elan' fleeing from the Tsarist police. The revolutionary in thrall to a vision of a future "City of the Sun" that he and his fellow-Utopians will construct, is idealistic and gentle, almost seraphic, and Kolia Ustuzhanin is drawn to him. But the bomb he throws at the police who have come to arrest him is far from gentle, and it reverberates with increasing force throughout the film, clearing the way for the holocaust at the picture's end.

The Second World War arrives in Elan' in the form of a recruiters' steamer that winds its way upriver to take the Siberian young men off to war. The people of Elan know nothing of the cataclysm shaking Eurasia; the village's one wireless has long been in disrepair. "Didn't we already fight the Germans?" they ask in perplexity.

Bombs, bombs, bombs. An incessant tramp of soldiers' feet. Huge mechanical engines of destruction soaring in the air and lumbering about on the earth. We encounter Alesha amid a scene of desolation and destruction—conveyed in black and white—dragging a severely wounded officer to safety (we later learn that it is Filka, Anastasia's first husband). All around is fetid water, dotted by shell fragments, a scene recalling Alesha's dream-like journey with his father into the swamps surrounding Elan' in quest of the "devil's patch". As Alesha crawls along dragging Filka in an improvised sling, huge tanks roar past like modern-day dinosaurs, symbolizing the widespread mechanical destruction. Fortunately, the tanks are "ours", and Alesha and Filka are saved; but the tanks remain a dreadful presage of the forces man can unleash upon man.

Finally, we come to the 1960s and Alesha's last return to his native village. This time he has to build a "City of the Sun" complete with high-rises and the appurtenances of "civilization". In the years since the end of the war, Alesha has become an oil prospector and is now a valued member of a drilling team, headed by the Azerbaijani Tofik from Paku, whose mustachioed face, dark complexion and harsh Russian intonations recall Stalin, whose image on posters and in documentary footage has been associated throughout the film with forced industrialization and breakneck modernization. The drilling team is in Elan' to find oil; if they fail

to do so, the area will be flooded by the construction of a large hydroelectric dam on the nearby river. Alesha's first symbolic act upon arriving at the village is to drive his vehicle through the finely wrought gates of Elan', knocking one of them off its hinges.

One day, unexpectedly, oil comes gushing out of the ground. Alesha, who had been about to leave the village, rushes to help. There is a moment of overwhelming exuberance as Tofik and his wondrous machines seek to harness the elemental outpouring from the earth. Then, suddenly, the gusher catches fire, and an inferno ensues. A fellow-worker is trapped under some machinery, and Alesha rushes to a crane to lift it. He succeeds, but the crane catches fire, and Alesha, like his mother before him, perishes amid flames. The village graveyard catches fire as well and burns to the accompaniment of religious choral music. The cross over Afanasii Ustuzhanin's grave is shown burning. Huge white birds, covered with oil, catch fire and flap helplessly about the graveyard, in a dramatic culmination of the film's use of bird imagery. Fire, not flood, has come to Elan', whose place-name symbolizes the precarious state of the Russian environment and of Russia herself.

At the film's end, Filka, Anastasia's first husband, now in a politically exalted position as a provincial party first secretary, returns to the village for the second time. Earlier he had come to Elan' while the drilling was progressing and had met Alesha, whom he recognized as Anastasia's son. Thinking of his former wife on that occasion, he realized that he should have stood up for her. As he visits the burned-out gutted village graveyard at the film's end, Filka is a good man, still close, despite his station, to the simplicity of relations characterizing the villagers. But does he realize what has happened, what must be done?

As such Western film-makers as Jon Voight have recognized, *Siberiade* is an extraordinary achievement, one of the best Soviet films of the post-Stalin period.[19] Using Dostoevskian symbolic patterns, the film recounts the searingly painful story of Russia's "terrible years". Something, the picture suggests, is out of joint in modern civilization; some elementary truths have been ignored or forgotten. And it asks important questions: Can the values of the traditional village—neighborliness, mutual love, respect for the natural environment—withstand a crash of loud music, raucous machinery, and bombs, bombs, bombs? Or is it to be the "devil's patch" and a fiery inferno? On the symbolic level, Konchalovsky appears to hedge his answer: Taia, the village woman, may be

bearing Alesha's child, and the Ustuzhanin (read: Russian) line may not be extinct, or she may be carrying Tofik's seed, in which case there is no hope. The questions permeating *Siberiade,* it should be noted, are universal as well as specifically Russian. A hundred million Soviet viewers flocked to the picture to form their own opinions. As for the regime, it seems to have made no attempt to co-opt the film, for obvious reasons.

VLADIMIR MEN'SHOV'S *MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN TEARS*[20]

Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears, which was directed by Vladimir Men'shov, won an American Academy Award in 1980. Despite this recognition, it has often been dismissed by Western (as well as Soviet) film critics as a soap opera, a lowbrow film catering to the masses. That the film is intentionally geared to the masses cannot be doubted. "I made this film", Men'shov stated during the round-table discussion of *Moscow* sponsored by *Iskusstvo kino,* "having in view a clear-cut audience: the mass viewer."[21]

Although the director intended his film to be a picture for the masses, the Soviet film industry apparently expected little from it. No special steps were taken to ensure *Moscow's* success; no flyers were issued; no ads were made on radio or television. "Simply the picture appeared on the screens, and for months now the lines for tickets have not dried up."[22] "Every one has come together in the lines for tickets—academicians and carpenters, heads of families and green youths."[23] In the two theaters in Moscow that showed the film, 1,860,000 viewers queued up to see the picture in the first two months it played, breaking all previous records.[24]

Moscow, which opens in the year 1958, examines the fate of three young women from the provinces living in a crowded workers' dormitory in the capital. The film follows the lives of the three women over the next two decades.

Beneath its soap-opera veneer, *Moscow* engages in significant social commentary. The fate of the endangered Russian family is, for example, a centerpiece of the film. At one point, Katia, the central heroine, talks to the director of a Soviet "dating bureau", whose job it is to bring isolated and lonely Soviet men and women together. The woman, who is idealistic and sincere, complains about the state of male-female relations in the Soviet Union—about social conditions that have led to a precipitous drop in the

birthrate, to poor work-habits and to alcoholism. All Soviet men want to do, she grouses, is drink and watch television. (The film notes the numbing social effects of modern television.)

A significant issue raised by the film is that of Western borrowings. *Moscow* is not xenophobic on this question, but it does articulate a nationalist view that Russians are too enamored of the West, particularly of the superficial aspects of its culture. The city of Moscow of 1958 is shown to be wild over a French film festival, while twenty years later Katia's daughter is rather too keen on ear-shattering Western pop music. The fashion of giving one's children foreign names is also implicitly criticized. "We used to have a lot of Rudolfs and Eduards," Katia tells Rudolf, who has since, we learn, changed his name to Rodion.

The participants in the *Iskusstvo kino* round-table discussion were nearly unanimous in their enthusiasm for *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*. 'This film is life itself, and the heroes are we ourselves," enthused Raisa Lifanova, the head of a section at the central telegraph office, and her sentiments were uniformly echoed.[25] "No falsehood [in the film]! For me that is very important," exlaimed Elena Kuritskaia, an engineer at a Moscow watch factory.[26] Similar enthusiasm is expressed in the excerpts from readers' letters published in the popular screen magazine *Sovetskii ekran*.[27] "The film touches those problems and those human relations that are often met with in daily life," wrote thirty-two signatories to a collective letter. A woman reader wrote in: "My daughter and I went to the film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*. No, that is not precise. We paid a visit to dear people close to our hearts." "As if spellbound," recalled another reader, "I have been walking about for several days under the influence of this film. I look around and see the kind eyes of its heroes…."

The use of the adjective *dobryi* ("kind" or "good") by the last-cited correspondent is not fortuitous. As Vera Alentova, the actress who played Katia in the film, remarked during the round-table discussion: "We wanted very much to produce a kind *(dobryi)* film —kind in the sense that kind, good people live and actinit…."[28] For the film's director, Men'shov, the fact that "the picture gives birth to warm feelings" in its viewers both corresponds to his intentions and is gratifying. He further points out that the film advocates tolerance for human foibles. "In my film, I do not judge any of the heroes."[29]

Almost in passing, Men'shov provided another key to the film's success: "I think that in this film I caught the Russian national character. It is sensed both in the situations and in the actions and in the manner of acting."[30] It should be noted that Men'shov here employed the term *Russian* national character, not Soviet. His film is intentionally geared to the concerns—the hopes, anxieties and fears—of the dominant nationality of the Soviet federation.

Faced with *Moscow's* overwhelming success, the Communist Party, which had not made a special effort to promote or publicize the film, decided to co-opt it. Boris Griaznov, first secretary of the Frunze district party organization in Moscow, praised the film, incongruously, for being "permeated with our Soviet Communist spirit".[31] The optimism pervading *Moscow* strikes him as a notable communist trait. Indeed, the picture reminds him of the Stalinist classic of the 1930s, *Chapayev,* and he pledges to make use of it for propaganda work with the masses.

Griaznov, of course, is wide of the mark. *Moscow* has nothing in common with the senescent official ideology. The optimism pervading the film is that of Dostoevsky and of much of the nineteenth-century Russian literary canon, not that of the official ideology. It is an optimism that contends that one must endure, that one must accept suffering, and that, when it seems too late, one may then find meaning and love. Kindness, refraining from judgement, acceptance of suffering—these are all anathema to Soviet Marxism-Leninism. In instances where the film does display ideological proclivities, it is in a Russian nationalist rather than Marxist direction. To the degree that one of Men'shov's aims in the film was to grasp and convey the Russian national character, he seems to have succeeded, and the masses responded by the million.

The final two films we shall be examining, *The Mirror* and *Agony,* suggest the limits placed on Russian nationalist cultural expression—at least, those which existed up until the Gorbachev period. The former film was made under extraordinary circumstances and was then excoriated by the Soviet film industry; the latter had to wait a decade (from 1975 to 1985) before obtaining its release in the Soviet Union.

ANDREI TARKOVSKY'S *THE MIRROR*

Tarkovsky's *The Mirror,* the most autobiographical of his films, has from the beginning been an object of controversy in the Soviet Union. As he stated during a July 1984 press conference in Italy, Tarkovsky had to appeal over the head of Goskino to the presidium of the 26th Party Conference in order to get permission for the film to be made.[32] Once the film was completed, it encountered a wall of opposition on the part of the Soviet film industry, A special joint session of representatives from Goskino and the Union of Filmmakers was convoked in early 1975 to examine *The Mirror* and three other films exhibiting "certain tendencies".[33]

At the joint session, it was Tarkovsky's film which attracted most of the attention and virtually all of the negative comments. While the majority of the speakers focused upon *The Mirror's* allegedly "élitist" character and its foreignness to the Soviet masses, some, as V.Baskakov, chose to highlight its political failings: "…the film lacks precision in depicting the relation of an individual to the epoch in which he lives…"[34] The epoch to which Mr Baskakov was referring is the period from the mid-1930s to the end of the Second World War, on which the film concentrates.

In addition to being a subtle and remarkably complex film about the experiences of a child, *The Mirror* seeks, often in Aesopian fashion, to meditate on the fate of Russia. It is upon this "meditation" that we shall concentrate our attention. The French critic Jacques Grant has written that the mirror referred to in the film's title is less a means of reflection than a barrier (barrage): "… it is placed by the filmmaker between himself and a world which he refuses to see and to discuss…."[35] The world which Tarkovsky refuses to see and to discuss is the ideocratic Soviet Union. However, as Grant points out, the film is not so much anti-Marxist as "a-Marxist".

In opposition to the Soviet ideocracy, Tarkovsky places "thousand-year-old" Christian Russia. Explicit keys to the symbolic meaning of the film are Dostoevsky's *The Devils,* the prologue to Dante's *The Divine Comedy,* Pushkin's "Letter to Chaadaev", and the Bible.

The bearer of a small mirror or looking-glass in Dostoevsky's *The Devils* is the strange young woman Mar'ia Lebiadkina, with whom the heroine of Tarkovsky's film, Maria, is explicitly

identified. Mar'ia Lebiadkina's yearning for a righteous prince takes on, as Joseph Frank has noted, "a good deal of historical-symbolical force" in the novel.[36] It is Mar'ia who unmasks Nikolai Stavrogin as a usurper, pretender and imposter. As émigré critic Tat'iana Panshina has pointed out, the image of the "pretender" is also central to Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*. Will Maria (read: Russia) recognize the pretender and deceiver?[37]

Canto I of *The Inferno,* which serves as an introduction to the entire *Divine Comedy,* raises related issues. Like Dante, Tarkovsky has made his film "in the middle of the journey of his life". The image of a "dark wood", which is central to the canto, recurs several times in the film, while Dante's "beats" find their parallel in the ominous shadows of the Stalin era (for example, the *tipografiia* scene in the film or the scene in which a young boy shows up a *politruk*). Both Dante and Tarkovsky yearn for a heroic deliverer from the powers of evil. As John Sinclair has written, there is a crossing and mingling in Dante's tale of the "personal and the public spiritual interest; for him they were essentially one".[38] The same could be said concerning the director of *The Mirror*. In Dante (as in Dostoevsky), Tarkovsky has chosen as a model an engaged civic poet who does battle to save his people from evil and to serve God.

Pushkin's "Letter to Chaadaev", which is read by the young boy in the film whose biography bears numerous similarities to that of Tarkovsky makes the filmmaker's burning painful love for Russia clear. "I am far from admiring all I see around me…." Pushkin writes to his correspondent. "But I swear to you on my honor that not for anything in the world would I be willing to change my fatherland, nor to have any other history than that of my ancestors, such as God gave it to us."[39] And Pushkin underlines his belief that Russia's absorption of the Mongol conquest saved Europe.

In the film's documentary footage, we see several examples of Russia's self-sacrificial exploits: Soviet soldiers forcing Sivash during the Second World War, destroying the Nazi threat to civilization; Russian soldiers holding back fanatic Maoists on the Sino-Soviet border at the time of the Chinese cultural revolution. The episode with Spanish émigrés of the thirties, which is highlighted by the film, makes a different point. The Spanish émigrés now want to return to Spain, but their children have forgotten Spanish songs. As Tat'iana Panshina comments: "The

heroine [Maria] recalls that Moses led his people out of captivity. But who will lead us, Russians, out?"[40]

The fourth explicit reference, the Bible, hints at an answer to this question. The poet-filmmaker-prophet who will lead Russia out is the son of Maria (Russia). One is offered images of a burning bush, of a bird (which in the New Testament symbolizes the Holy Spirit) which sits on the young boy's head or is released from the grown man's hand. Tarkovsky is in the line of Russian artists who see their vocation as like that of the biblical prophets.

I conclude with the words of French film critic Maurice Clavel: "There exists no other film like *[The Mirror]*. One can see how little subjectivist this film is. Perhaps it itself is sacrificial, like Russia according to Pushkin."[41]

ELEM KLIMOV'S *AGONY*

This film, which was completed in 1975 but not released until 1985, coincided with the widespread interest in Nicholas II's reign prevalent among Soviet intellectuals during the Brezhnev period. The film focuses upon the penultimate year of Nicholas's rule, 1916; and, while it is at times cavalier in its treatment of historical fact, *Agony* is reasonably accurate as far as the "big picture" of the epoch is concerned. This is particularly true as regards the film's two central protagonists: Nicholas II and Grigorii Rasputin. It is on their blue eyes—on their twin "agonies"—that the film concentrates.

In a break with Soviet cultural tradition, Klimov shows Nicholas to have been a good man, albeit one with a weak will. (This "deviation" in depicting Nicholas was probably the chief reason that the film was shelved for ten years.) Nicholas is by temperament an artist, not a leader; at the film's beginning, we see him at work on a painting, and later we observe him in a darkroom developing photographs of his family. Nicholas understands that Rasputin has a hypnotic hold on his consort, but her will is stronger than his; he submits to her, though not always, and frequently with misgivings.

Klimov's Rasputin is a remarkable achievement, due in large part to a versatile acting performance by Aleksei Petrenko. We are shown a most complex individual: a Siberian rogue and thief; an inspired liar; a semi-demented wonderworker; a lover of power and influence. There is sympathy as well as revulsion in Klimov's

portrait. Rasputin's sarcastic view of ministers of the realm such as Sturmer and Aleksei Khvostov is shown to be thoroughly warranted. A populist, Rasputin is close to the common people and wishes them well; he sincerely grieves over their great losses during the First World War.

Rasputin's "agony", like that of Nicholas, is the object of close scrutiny by the film. Rasputin tells his spiritual daughter and go-between with the empress, Anna Vyrubova, that he knows that he is doomed but is unable to escape his fate. In a sense, he is Nicholas's tragic "double", the reason, perhaps, that Klimov endows both of them with blond hair and blue eyes—the historic Rasputin having been dark.

The film also treats the "agony" of a third protagonist—the Russian people. Its agony is conveyed in monochrome, contrasting with the vivid colors used to show the dying regime. The Russian people are shown as "lambs" (there is a play on the place-name Baranovichi, recalling the Russian word for sheep, *baran*) being led to the slaughter. We see them being blown up by shells, receiving prosthetic devices. The "agonies" of Nicholas and Rasputin have engendered the agony of the Russian people.

There is also a religious dimension to the film, though it is not an easy one to articulate. In fact, if one were to remain on the film's surface, one could argue that *Agony* is anti-religious. Thus, for example, Rasputin's throng of female admirers is shown to include a bevy of nuns who keep vigil at his flat on Gorokhovaia Street. There is, however, another, semi-Aesopian level to the film.

The film shows us a bizarre episode in which a woman whom Rasputin has never met sings him a haunting "angelic" song over the telephone. She has done this, we are told, on previous occasions as well. After numerous pleadings, Rasputin convinces the woman to give him her apartment-number. He arrives dressed in an expensive shirt, with his unruly hair combed and pomaded. After a drink, he leads the beautiful pale woman to the bed. But inside the bed he unexpectedly discovers a filthy "fool for Christ's sake". A bishop and a priest then rush in brandishing a cross and demand that Rasputin repent for having recently raped a nun. The holy fool pushes dirt into Rasputin's mouth while the woman who served as "bait" puts on a nun's habit. Rasputin fervently promises to amend his ways.

The voice of the "singing nun" recurs at a second critical juncture in the film. Rasputin has arrived at Prince Iusupov's house

(where a group of assassins are waiting to kill him) in the hope of meeting Iusupov's wife, a fabled beauty. After several hours and a botched attempt to poison Rasputin, Iusupov's fellow-conspirators finally turn off the phonograph upstairs upon which they have been playing "Yankee Doodle". An eerie silence ensues. Rasputin then hears the nun's voice singing and asks: "Are those angels singing?" ("Angely poiut, chto-li"). He is then shot by Iusupov (and later shot again by Purishkevich). Rasputin's death is thus linked by Klimov to his earlier encounter with the nun, bishop, priest, holy fool, and the cross. Retribution has come.

The title of the film likewise represents an important key to Klimov's message. The title refers, ultimately, to the suffering endured by Christ shortly before His crucifixion: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.... And *being in an agony* he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground" (Luke, 22.42–4). (Klimov's most recent film, *Come and See,* also contains a biblical reference in its title.) In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ foreknows that He must endure the suffering of the cross, wishes that "the cup might pass from Him", but accepts the will of God the Father. Such religious acceptance is a hidden message of Klimov's *Agony*.

In the final analysis, Klimov seems to believe, Russia's agony was inevitable. It was God's will. The corruption of the upper classes and the depravity of elements in the peasantry led to a kind of mystical breaking-point. Following the slaughter of the First World War, there occurred the brutal execution of Nicholas and his family, the horror of the civil war, the Gulag Archipelago and the Stalin holocaust.

To summarize, the five films that we have examined show that the Russian nationalist tendency has, despite the restrictions of the Soviet censorship, been able to express itself, if at times in Aesopian fashion, through the all-important medium of film. Some nationalist issues can be expressed fairly openly in film—for example, environmentalist and anti-urban sentiments; others, such as anti-collectivization animus or religious sentiments, can only be hinted at. Like the *derevenshchik* "school" in literature, Russian nationalist filmmakers have been making an important contribution to the intellectual life of the contemporary Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is evolving—quite rapidly during the

Gorbachev period—and film, which can reach a mass audience, has served to speed up that process of evolution.

NOTES

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1 John B.Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), and *The New Russian Nationalism* (New York: Praeger/CSIS, 1985).

2 Under Khrushchev and Andropov, the regime took a particularly hostile stance *vis-à-vis* Russian nationalism. There was little attempt to coopt the tendency during their leadership.

3 Lev Anninskii, "Put' pisatelia", in *O Shukshine* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), p. 125, and Vsevolod Sanaev, "Tri zhizni Vasiliia Makarovicha", in ibid., p. 286.

4 Aleksei Kapler, "Spor v vagone", in ibid., p. 172.

5 Georgii Kapralov, "Bor'ba za cheloveka nikogda ne konchaetsia", in ibid., p. 172.

6 Kapler, in ibid., p. 172.

7 Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), p. 382.

8 "Obsuzhdaem 'Kalinu krasnuiu': kinopovest' i fil'm V.Shukshina", *Voprosy literatury,* no. 7 (1974), p. 86.

9 V.Fomin, "V.Shukshin: Strasti po Egoru", in *Ekran, 1973–1974* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1975), p. 115.

10 See, for example, Shukshin's 1967 essay "Monolog na lestnitse", in *Nravstvennost' est' pravda* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1979), pp. 51–75.

11 Michel Heller, "Vasily Shukshin: in search of Freedom", in Donald M.Fiene (ed.), *Vasily Shukshin* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1979), pp. 227–9.

12 "*Kalina krasnaia:* Kinopovest!", in Vasilii Shukshin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1975), p. 441.

13 "Kommentarii", in *Nravstvennost' est'pravda,* p. 322.

14 Konstantin Rudnitskii, "Proza i ekran", in *O Shukshine,* p. 55. For a recent study devoted to Shukshin's career as a filmmaker, see Iu. Tiurin, *Kinematograf Vasiliia Shukshina* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1984).

15 This is a significantly condensed version of a section of an essay appearing in my book *The New Russian Nationalism.*
16 "Grand entretien avec Mikhalkov Kontchalovskii", *Cinéma,* no. 247–8 (1979), p. 74.
17 See the interview with Konchalovskii in the *Boston Globe,* "From Russia to Hollywood", 11 January 1986.
18 The theme of the "anthill" is, of course, a leitmotif in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground.*
19 *People,* 11 April 1983, p. 38.
20 This is a significantly condensed version of a section of an essay appearing in my book *The New Russian Nationalism.*
21 "Pochemu tak vzvolnovany zriteli? (Kruglyi stol 'IK')", *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 9 (1980), p. 28.
22 ibid., p. 16.
23 ibid., p. 14.
24 ibid., p. 35.
25 ibid., p. 24.
26 ibid., p. 26.
27 "V kakoi elektrichke edet Gosha?", *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 13 (1980), pp. 14–15.
28 "Pochemu tak vzvolnovany", p. 25.
29 ibid., p. 30.
30 ibid., p. 30.
31 ibid., p. 31.
32 "Beseda s A.A.Tarkovskim i ego zhenoi Larisoi", RS (Radio Svoboda) 159/84, 27 July 1984, p. 3.
33 "Glavnaia tema—Sovremennost'", *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 3 (1975), pp. 1–18.
34 ibid., p. 10.
35 Jacques Grant, "Andrei Tarkovsky: le miroir, l'irreconciliable", *Cinéma,* no. 231 (1978), p. 68.
36 Joseph Frank, "The masks of Stavrogin", *Sewanee Review,* Autumn 1969, p. 678.
37 Tat'iana Panshina, "Rossiia v ozhidanii chuda", *Russkaia mysl',* 23 February 1978, p. 11.
38 John D.Sinclair, "Note to canto I", *Dante's Inferno* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 32.
39 *The Letters of Alexander Pushkin* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 780.
40 Panshina, "Rossiia v ozhidanii chuda".
41 Maurice Clavel in Jean-Loup Passek (ed.), *Le Cinéma russe* (Paris: L'Equerre, 1981), p. 284.

CHAPTER 12
Socialist Realism and American Genre Film: The Mixing of Codes in Jazzman

HERBERT EAGLE

Jazzman's plot is very simple. A young pianist, Konstantin Ivanov (Kostia), is thrown out of the conservatory in Odessa for playing jazz. The year is 1928, and the "proletarian" art movements with their ideological allies are urging the suppression of jazz as a "decadent" product of bourgeois culture. Undaunted, Kostia puts up signs advertising for jazz musicians, and two apparently unemployed street-musicians, Stepan and Georgii, sign up. They don't know what jazz is, but they are attracted by Kostia's promises of the fame and glory they will achieve as the country's first jazz band. The group begins practicing in a park. But some official-looking men in suits, accompanied by a burly thug, break up their rehearsal. Kostia blames this on the group's poor playing. They need less antics and more hard work, he tells them as they sit on an empty beach.

Just when it appears that the disgruntled Stepan and Georgii will abandon their dedicated leader, two very well dressed men approach and offer the group 600 rubles—an impressive sum—to play the next evening at a birthday-party at the Paradise Restaurant.

This "gig" is a great success. The band—Kostia on piano, Stepan on banjo, Georgii on drums—sounds much better now, and the audience is most appreciative, particularly the distinguished honored guest, a man of about 60 who has the appearance of a successful businessman. He reminisces with Kostia about the ragtime music he had heard in Chicago in 1908, and both men exchange stories about their favorite American tunes and performers. Later, though, a brawl begins in the restaurant, police raid the establishment (the well-to-do birthday celebrants were apparently gangsters), and the jazzmen end up in jail. There they meet Ivan Ivanovich Bavorin (Ivanych, in prison for drunkenness, is a former first saxophonist in the Tsar's personal

marching band). Ivanych is of course recruited by Kostia, and when the four are released they set out for the big time in Moscow.

The plot continues to follow the ups and downs of the struggling band. They successfully audition for a job on the radio, but the semi-official campaign against jazz catches up with them and they are out on the street again.

Kostia is discouraged and ready to give up. The others conspire to cheer him up by staging a visit by the renowned jazz expert Kolbasev of Leningrad, an officer in the Red Navy (Kolbasev would listen to their "sound" and give them his seal of approval). They hire a surly old sailor to play the rôle of Kolbasev—and the resulting scene is a comic fiasco. However, even though the ruse is exposed, Kostia is inspired by his friends' loyalty and devotion.

The jazzmen get an assignment to play at the Transport Workers' Club, and are later able to schedule a "First Concert of Proletarian Jazz" to which they invite the real Kolbasev by telegram.

On the appointed night, however, the concert is cancelled, amidst taunts ("Agents of bourgeois culture! Down with jazz bands!"). Our heroes are left with an empty hall. At this very moment, the real Kolbasev arrives, in the uniform of a high-ranking Soviet naval officer (an admiral, perhaps). "Excuse me for being late," he says. The theater lights go up, we see an inserted shot of a record beginning to spin, and the next shot shows the audience suddenly packed and applauding enthusiastically.

A reverse shot of the band performing on stage reveals our familiar buoyant jazzmen, but they are now all grey-haired men in their sixties. The film ends with four close-ups of the musicians when they were young.

The plot is, thus, not only rather episodic, but also lacking in clear causal relationships among the sequences. Two viewpoints about jazz are presented: the conservative view that it is a product of decadent bourgeois culture; and Kostia's more enlightened insistence on its roots in black folk-music, and consequently on its appropriateness for the proletariat. However, these views are explicitly stated in the very first sequence; they do not develop, they merely alternate. Nor is the film's plot organized rhetorically to prove the correctness of either view. Thus, the character Clementine Fernandez is Black and Cuban, but her dress and lifestyle are clearly more upper-class; some of the Russians who are

shown enjoying jazz are workers, but the audiences at the Hermitage Garden seem to be the Soviet equivalent of a bourgeois nightclub set. In fact viewers not familiar with the history of Soviet jazz (including most American audiences) are apt to be confused by the unexpected turns in the jazzmen's fortunes. If Kostia is expelled from the conservatory for playing jazz in Odessa, why, in Moscow, does an established swing band continue to enjoy prestige and to play for an audience which presumably includes high party officials? While newspapers are denouncing jazz, how can the jazzmen be accepted as part of the Association of Proletarian Musicians, whose platform also condemns jazz? And what transpired between the forced closing of the "proletarian" jazz concert in 1929 and the extremely positive reception accorded that same jazz in the 1960s? Was a "proletarian" jazz developed in opposition to "bourgeois" jazz, and did it finally win official approval? The film does not answer these causal questions, nor does it even explicitly pose them. The hermeneutic code generally prominent in classical film narrative is only weakly functional here. The central question is: Will Kostia's jazz band succeed? The final answer is—yes. But the reasons for the ups and downs, and the ultimate success, are never clear. The events appear to be dictated by an inscrutable Fate.

Indeed, historically this is not far off the mark where Soviet jazz is concerned. Under the *laissez-faire* cultural policies of the NEP period, jazz flourished in the mid-1920s, spurred by the successful tours of two American jazz bands with all-black performers. By 1928, Alexandr ("Bob") Tsfasman's Jazz Band of the Association of Moscow Authors (Amadzhaz) played to cheering crowds at Moscow's Hermitage Gardens, and some important party officials considered jazz more legitimate as proletarian music than, for example, the experiments of avant-garde classical composers. In fact Lunacharsky's Markompros (Commissariat of Enlightenment) sponsored the trip of Soviet jazz pianist Leopold Teplitskii to Philadelphia to study jazz in its native habitat.[1]

At the same time, there were powerful forces working against the acceptance of jazz. The demands of the proletarian culture movement *(Proletkult)* for art forms *created* by proletarians had been rejected as official policy in 1920, but had resurfaced in the mid-1930s in such groups as RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and the similarly inclined Association of Proletarian Musicians. These groups sought to

define the directions of proletarian art rather than to respond to actually existing popular forms like jazz. For them, the people who liked jazz had been corrupted by bourgeois values. An article written by Maxim Gorky in 1928, "On the music of the gross", was also highly influential in characterizing jazz negatively:

> The monstrous bass belches out English words; a wild horn wails piercingly, calling to mind the cries of a raving camel; a drum pounds monotonously; a nasty little pipe tears at one's ears; a saxophone emits its quacking nasal sound. Fleshy hips sway, and thousands of heavy feet tread and shuffle. The music of the degenerate ends finally with a deafening thud, as though a case of pottery had been flung to earth from the skies.[2]

Gorky's view that jazz represented a capitalist manipulation of savage and degenerate sexual impulses was echoed by Lunacharsky at the First All-Russian Musical Conference in 1929. In the words of historian S.Frederick Starr:

> At the heart of both Gorky's and Lunacharsky's theses was the notion that jazz and the way of life associated with it were totally bourgeois.... Marx had argued that Christianity was the opiate of the masses. Jazz and the fox-trot were now the dominant religion, manipulated by the new capitalist masters in order to secure and extend their dominion.[3]

The conference was followed with a wave of repression, which we see catching up with *Jazzman's* heroes in 1929.

However, this was hardly the last word. By 1930 the failure of the Association of Proletarian Musicians to come up with any popular alternatives led to calls for the creation of an entirely new "proletarian" jazz repertoire. Thus, a theory of "two jazzes" led to the rehabilitation and, in fact, to the flourishing of jazz during the 1932–6 period. In 1936, in the midst of Stalin's purges, *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* exchanged nineteen articles over a two-month period in a debate over jazz, with *Izvestiia* condemning jazz and *Pravda* defending it. *Pravda's* apparent victory related more to the strategies of the Stalinist party against the government faction represented in *Izvestiia,* however. For as soon as the purge of Bukharin was completed the Party adopted much of *Izvestiia's*

position. In 1937 many jazzmen were arrested, including the actual Kolbasev, and never seen again.[4]

For three more decades jazz remained a political football, condemned or tolerated as a component of larger policies and controversies: it was revived during the Soviet Union's Second World War alliance with the United States, harshly condemned and virtually obliterated during the xenophobic Cold War period, co-opted during the "Thaw", denounced by Khrushchev at the Manege exhibit in 1963, and once again made legitimate in the early Brezhnev years (1965–7), presumably the period of *Jazzman's* climactic flash-forward.

Thus, the confusing ideological claims and the sudden political shifts with respect to jazz which we see in *Jazzman* are accurate in terms of the historical events themselves. But the film does not really elucidate this situation in terms of causes and effects; rather, it gains its most important meanings against the background of two aesthetic systems and their codes: that of American "genre" film, primarily the musical, and that of Soviet "socialist realism".

Jazzman resembles in its plot structure and its paradigmatic opposition the principal variant of the American film musical in the 1930s, the so-called "backstage" musical, where the main characters are engaged in an effort to put on some sort of show or musical performance. The most well known representatives of this subgenre are the early Busby Berkeley musicals *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *42nd Street* (1933), and *Footlight Parade* (1933), *Follow the Fleet* (1936), *Swing Time* (1936) and *Shall We Dance* (1937). In these films, as in *Jazzman,* many of the musical numbers are motivated as auditions, rehearsals and performances. The individual talents and initiatives of the major characters come into conflict with factors which work against the realization of the performances and the happy resolution of the accompanying romantic subplots. Depending on the film these adversarial factors include the severe conditions of the Depression, the machinations of corrupt characters, the competing demands of love and money, the conflict between informality and propriety, and the clash between popular forms and high art forms. Various commentators have suggested basic opposition underlying the plot conflicts: the pleasurable world of entertainment versus cold economic demands, energetic creative play versus stultifying labor, spontaneity versus monotony and predictability. Rick Altman has

identified the values of entertainment in the musical with the realm of socially proscribed values generally.[5]

The resolution of the plot in the musical (by the successful realization of the performance and by the "marriage" of characters embodying the opposition on some level) is augmented by the mediation of conflicting values in the musical numbers themselves: when the show goes on, the drudgery of earning a living through work becomes the joy of creative play; the spontaneity of the performers is combined with a sense of order and discipline (as in Busby Berkeley's precise and drill-like choreography); the conflict between popular values and élite values is resolved (as in the Fred Astaire—Ginger Rogers musicals).

One of the first Soviet musicals, Grigorii Aleksandrov's *The Happy Guys,* had already adopted some of these patterns in 1934. In that film, a jazz-loving singing shepherd, Kostia Potekhin (played by Leonid Utesov, one of the most well known jazzmen of the time), rises to fame and fortune with his jazz band, the Happy Guys. As in the backstage musical, rehearsals and performances motivate almost all of the musical sequences, including one inspired by Berkeley's spectaculars (Aleksandrov had recently returned from a stay in Hollywood). The Happy Guys reach the pinnacle of popular music with a performance at the Moscow Music-Hall, and then conquer the seat of high culture, the Bolshoi Theater. S.Frederick Starr assesses the film's significance in this way:

> The film's light-hearted music and endless slapstick certainly assaulted Soviet puritanism. But a second theme, no less pronounced than the first, sets the world of exuberant youth and anarchic popular culture against the stolid establishment whose members thwart the rise of jazzman-shepherd Kostia Potekhin. The wild scene of the jazz band on the stage of the Bolshoi symbolizes the triumph of spontaneity over order, youth over age, popular culture over high culture.[6]

The extent to which *Jazzman* alludes to *The Happy Guys* (borrowing even the lead character's first name) and to the American musical genre is quite evident. *Jazzman's* opening sequence contrasts the stiff, formal, authoritative, upper-class atmosphere of a classical conservatory examination with the spontaneous, lively, improvised music which Kostia plays in that

setting. The poles of spontaneity and popular culture are thus sharply and directly juxtaposed with those of control, authority and upper-class culture. The red banner at the back of the recital-hall, which reads "Art for the Workers", underscores the conflict: Which of these two patterns is more appropriate for Soviet society?

Kostia's first two recruits are linked to spontaneity and to popular culture. In the sequence which precedes their seeing Kostia's advertisement for musicians, Stepan and Georgii are singing *chastushki* (popular urban ditties) in the streets of Odessa, among the people, in a clowning slapstick routine which recalls vaudeville and American silent comedy. The competing needs of money and fun are then evoked in a dialogue exceedingly reminiscent of the American musical of the Depression years. Stepan runs into a girlfriend who also has been unemployed; she tells the guys that she has just landed a job with the Health Ministry's "hygiene choir", where you get "free meals plus soap", a welfare-type option which doesn't appeal to Stepan and Georgii. When they see Kostia's poster, with its promise of glamor, they are immediately attracted even though they don't know what jazz is.

The *semes*—to use Roland Barthes' terminology—of playfulness, recklessness and impracticality are particularly strong in the characters of Stepan and Georgii. In Kostia, these impulses are wedded to elements of discipline, order and the work ethic as well. "The essence of jazz is syncopation", Kostia tells his new recruits, and this formula is in a sense emblematic of Kostia's mediating function. For syncopation is an off-beat stress, yet that stress occurs according to certain principles of rhythmic organization. In a similar manner, Kostia's insistence on the crucial importance of improvisation (implying personal freedom) is coupled with an emphasis on the need for practice and "work, work, work!" (implying regularity and control). After the group reaches the posh (i.e. pleasurable) hotel in Moscow, Kostia announces their next rehearsal as follows: "Court opens at 9 a.m.! You get fined for poor performance!"

The image of the talented musician or musical director as an inspirational yet firm leader, even somewhat of a martinet, had already been presented in the American genre by James Cagney's portrayal of Kent in *Footlight Parade*. Kent tells his charges: "Nobody leaves this place till Saturday night.... You're gonna work your heads off...day and night.... We're gonna drive you...

and curse you…and break your heart…but by Saturday night we'll have what I want!" The drill-like precision of Berkeley's choreography, of course, reinforces this impression of discipline and order, and the idea that hard work as well as talent is necessary for success comes across strongly in the character played by the earnest Ruby Keeler.

Comparison between the nature of the musical numbers in *Jazzman* and the adjacent turns of the plot is also quite revealing of the need to balance work and play. At its first rehearsal, in an open-air band-shell, the jazz group is very zany, eccentrically dressed and engaging in wild antics. This display is broken up by the (presumably) party official and his "enforcer". Kostia's reaction is to tell the group that they must work to become more disciplined. On the other hand, excessive control also leads nowhere. When the former Tsarist bandsman Ivanych joins the group, they initially sound terrible, because Ivanych always plays exactly according to the notes (i.e. excessive control); he simply cannot learn improvisation. Only after Ivanych loosens up after the impromptu celebration of his birthday does he suddenly begin to improvise. In the next sequence, the jazz band's fortunes take an immediate turn for the better as they are successful at their radio-station audition.

The juxtapositions between wildness and dissolution (being "out of bounds") on the one hand, and discipline and control on the other, are not presented as contradictions which are incompatible, however. Reserved for different characters who are friends and co-workers, those tendencies seem to complement each other, as the film flows smoothly from one mode to the other. Thus, when the group lands in prison after the nightclub brawl, Stepan and Georgii gleefully count out the 579 rubles they have been paid ("in small bills!"). "We ought to give this money to the government, it's been stolen," announces Kostia. "Let's just keep it," insist the others, "all in favor say 'aye'." Then Kostia replies that, in any case, he will turn in his share—and the matter ends there. Similarly, after the fellows wine and dine Clementine, getting drunk and calling in a gypsy band, they wake up the next morning with hangovers and with their money gone. Kostia assumes it has been stolen, but when the others remind him that they simply "blew it" he accepts his own loss of control with equanimity. What is conveyed in the jazz band's behavior is that play and work can be effectively combined, as can spontaneity and control.

To the contrary, the enemies of jazz are always portrayed in an unqualifiedly negative manner. The professor and the music students who condemn jazz are unfeeling dogmatic disciplinarians, the officials of the Association of Proletarian Musicians are bland and doctrinaire, and the crowds which shout anti-jazz slogans appear to be mindless puppets of a monochromatic ideology.

The characters who are positive in their stance toward jazz are consistently more colorful, lively and interesting. The jazz-loving gangsters are depicted as intelligent, well informed, sensitive, open-minded and friendly. When the head gangster retires from the birthday-party, he says: "I want to wish our Soviet pioneers of jazz the greatest success, because their success is our success.... It's my bedtime now, but you youngsters stay and play on." The Cuban Clementine Fernandez is exotic, elegant and warm, and Ivanych carries on a charmingly old-fashioned flirtation with her. The leader of the *Amadzhaz* band is handsome, suave and sophisticated in the manner of Duke Ellington. And, of course, the enemies of jazz stand in sharpest contrast to the tenor of the musical numbers themselves, which always embody sensuality, spontaneity and fun. This is true not only of the sequences featuring Kostia's band, but also of those with the "sweet" *Amadzhaz* swing band at the Hermitage Gardens. During the sequence of Clementine Fernandez' arrival at the railroad station, in which song and dance erupt from an everyday situation, as is typical in the later American "integrated" musicals, the same high spirit is present. In fact, whenever the lead characters begin to be depressed by their failures, a musical sequence of some kind is inserted to "lift" them.

Although the norms of the American musical clearly provide the dominant organizing structures in *Jazzman,* there are allusions to other American genres that possess common thematic concerns. The comic sequences—in particular the use of slapstick routines—evoke the anarchic eccentric streak in American silent comedy. Reversals of type, such as from bum to aristocrat, recall Chaplin's devices—for example, in the scene where the old sailor is hired to impersonate Kolbasev. Once the sailor is dressed as an officer, his attitude changes as well; instead of being the jazzmen's puppet, he treats them with condescension and disdain, completely upsetting their plans.

The scene involving the well-dressed crooks in the nightclub is specifically reminiscent of the American gangster genre. In the classic films of the early 1930s, *Little Caesar* (1930), *Public Enemy*

(1931) and *Scarface* (1932), the gangster hero is a "little man" who rises to the top of his business through skill, drive and initiative which parallel those required of a Horatio Alger type of hero in the actual business world. Furthermore, with the gangster-heroes typed ethnically as recent immigrants, the rise and fall of the gangster represented a modelling of the immigrant's "American dream" and, at the same time, an assertion of its impossibility. At the pinnacle of their success (i.e. before their inevitable fall), the gangsters achieve the outward trappings of the wealth, habits and rituals of the successful businessman. The testimonial dinner or a similar party, wherein the gangster is fêted in nightclub surroundings, was a common device to mark this parallel. In fact the speech made to congratulate the head gangster in *Jazzman* is quite similar to one made in like circumstances in *Little Caesar*. Thus, the image of the gangster as an individual trying to achieve a position for himself in a battle against established forces is one which complements that of the struggling musician. Indeed, in some of the early gangster films the path of the gangster is paralleled by that of an up-and-coming musician or performer who is the gangster's friend.

Thus, in addition to the themes—whose link to the musical tradition has already been noted—*Jazzman* presents us with an overriding *metatextual* implication. For in appropriating not only jazz from American culture, but also the structures of the film musical and certain features of other American genres which champion individuality, *Jazzman* makes a statement about the suitability and appropriateness of those borrowings. Are they appropriate because the issues or needs these popular forms address are common to both American and Soviet culture, irrespective of the culture's differing political ideologies? And, if so, wouldn't *Jazzman* be displacing official Soviet ideology as a major concern?

But of course it is difficult for a Soviet film dealing with post-revolutionary society to disregard the prevailing official Marxist-Leninist ideology, and *Jazzman* does not do this. That ideological inflection is provided by a significant admixture of the canons of "socialist realist" narrative and film.

Space does not allow me to deal in this paper with the origins and development of socialist realism, but let me briefly characterize this official policy of Soviet art at least as it existed during the period from the early 1930s until the death of Stalin

(1953). The canon's major stipulation is that reality be depicted not *as such,* but in terms of its "revolutionary development"; that is to say, events should be represented in a way which makes clear the accuracy of the official ideological understanding of the period and the historical forces acting within it. The *model* form of development should be visible. A second requirement, frequently termed partiinost'("party-mindedness"), is related to serving the explicit immediate needs of party policy by fostering appropriate attitudes on a variety of specific current issues. The art forms are also expected to be clear, openly didactic, optimistic and relatively simple.

Within parameters broad enough to accommodate a wide variety of subject-matter, the underlying path of the socialist realist plot, according to a detailed study by Katerina Clark, can be described as follows: "a questing hero sets out in search of 'consciousness'. En route, he encounters obstacles that test his strength and determination, but in the end he attains his goal." Admittedly, this is a very common sort of plot in world culture. But, in the case of socialist realism, Clark continues: "the hero's quest typically has a dual goal. On the one hand, he has before him a task from the public sphere…. But his second, and more important, goal is to resolve within himself the tension between 'spontaneity' and 'consciousness'."[7]

Clark identifies the following plot *functions,* in the Proppian sense of the term. (1) *Prologue*: "the hero arrives in the microcosm" of the narrative. (2) *Setting up the task*: "The hero sees that all is not good in the microcosm." He "concocts a scheme for righting the wrong…his plan coincides with the deepest desires of all…true workers". But "when the hero presents his plan to the local bureaucrats…they reject…. The hero mobilizes 'the people' and inspires them to follow his plan". (3) *Transition*: "Work on the hero's project begins" but "is hampered by a series of snags". "The hero makes a journey (perhaps only by telephone) seeking help from more authoritative persons." (4) *Climax*: "The hero's task seems unfulfillable, usually when a 'dramatic-heroic' obstacle appears to threaten its completion." (5) *Incorporation*: "The hero has a talk with his local mentor, and this gives him the strength to carry on." (6) *Finale*: "Completion of task…. A7 ceremony or celebration to mark the task's completion."[8]

Jazzman's plot follows this general path, albeit with a diminished emphasis on the social and political problematics.

None the less, in the "Prologue" scene, Kostia is expelled from the conservatory of "classical" music into the world of people's music, and sets for himself the task of making jazz a success as proletarian music ("Art for the Workers"). In answer to the accusation that he is "popularizing that monstrous product of bourgeois culture", Kostia replies in a patently ideological way: "You don't understand the social roots of jazz—Negro folk songs and blues. Jazz originates with Black slaves, and Negroes are the most oppressed group in the USA. So jazz can't be bourgeois." Kostia's scheme for righting the wrong attitude he finds is the formation of a jazz band; the popular response the jazz band achieves when it is allowed to play shows that the plan does coincide with the deep desires of workers. However, local authorities and bureaucrats thwart his plans.

In the transition sequences, we see three of the key elements noted by Clark: work on the project begins (the rehearsal); it is hampered by a series of snags (mainly the campaigns against jazz); and ultimately help is sought from a more authoritative person (Kolbasev). Typically, the authoritative person is a party member and/or a hero of the Civil War; thus, Kolbasev is an officer in the Red Navy. However, at this stage in *Jazzman's* plot, approval and encouragement are sought not from the real Kolbasev, but from a substitute. Although the approval sought has to do ostensibly with the *quality* of the jazz-playing, the mere presence of Kolbasev would symbolically indicate an ideological approval of jazz as well.

At *Jazzman's* climax, the cancellation of the First Concert of Proletarian Jazz appears to be an insurmountable obstacle. However, the sudden appearance of the real Kolbasev gives the jazzmen the strength to carry on, as evidenced in the finale when we see them playing jazz to the packed hall (albeit thirty years later). The audience's enthusiastic applause constitutes the "celebration to mark the task's completion".

Jazzman's adherence to a socialist realist plot is even clearer if one compares it to what Clark terms "the worthy intellectual or inventor" variant. In this variant, the task is specifically to create or invent something, and to get the new idea approved. The obstacles are both practical and political ("struggles with the enemies of 'truth'").

For Clark, the centrality of the spontaneity-consciousness dialectic in socialist realism is due to the genuine ideological

paradox caused by Lenin's "voluntarism" (the belief that individual initiatives can alter or at least hasten the course of historical evolution as Marx envisioned it).

In works of the late Stalin period, the beliefs of the "positive hero" undergo less and less change in the course of the narrative. He or she is a member of the élite club of heroes, a model of what *should* be from the very beginning:

> Not just Stalin, but all heroes of the Stalinist thirties portray this new image…they are all "struggle", "vigilance", heroic achievement, energy, and another cluster of qualities rather like the "true grit" of the American frontiers: "stickability" *(vyderzhka),* "hard as flint" *(kremen')*, and "will" *(volia)*.[9]

Whereas in early socialist realism—for example, the Vasil'ev brothers' film *Chapaev* (1934)—there is a split between a spontaneous hero (the peasant Red Army commander Chapaev) and one who is the author of the original novel, in the late Stalin period the hero already comprises both poles.

Clark characterizes this dynamic in terms of political "fathers" and political "sons":

> …while the symbolic hero does indeed defy, he also relishes an opportunity to pay tribute to a truly luminous authority figure, a "father". It is only those false authority figures, the stultifying, restrictive bureaucrats, whom the hero's "surging" nature leads him instinctively to defy. Thus his "revolt" is more a matter of joining the father in his struggles against those bureaucrats and their ilk.[10]

The "father" figure in the narrative need not be Stalin himself, "but a sort of Stalin-to-scale". It is their "link with the founder of the dynasty, Lenin, that makes them exceptional, and they can, in turn, bestow this exceptional nature on their 'sons'".[11] Participation in the Civil War, which is the case with Kolbasev, is one such typical link.

As far as Kolia is concerned, he possesses many of the characteristics of the typical "positive hero". His enthusiastic and emotional love of jazz, his drive to play jazz no matter what (his last words in the opening conservatory sequence are: "I want to say this: I *will* play jazz") are indicative of his spontaneity. His

understanding of the origins of jazz as the cultural expression of exploited working people is evidence of his ideological consciousness. In his quest he exhibits the typical traits of the *bogatyr'-like* socialist realist hero: energy, willpower, courage, honesty (recall his wanting to return the stolen money to the Government) and determination. He moves not so much toward consciousness, which he already possesses to a large extent, as toward validation and valorization.

In conclusion, what hypotheses can we draw about the coexistence in *Jazzman* of the traits of two systems, those of popular American genre film and those of socialist realism? First, that certain difficult contradictions of values within the two societies (freedom and order, spontaneity and consciousness, popular impulses and élite norms) have sufficient resemblance to one another to be effectively fused in a single work; second, and perhaps more important, that the accommodation to socialist realism in *Jazzman* becomes a means of validating the borrowing of Western cultural forms which have become popular with Soviet youth in particular. This "metatextual" level would seem to be the most relevant in the contemporary period of blue jeans and rock music. For if jazz and American musicals can be a part of socialist realism this suggests that Marxist-Leninist ideology can find ways to accept the presence of popular American borrowings in Soviet life.

NOTES

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1 S.Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 54–78.
2 ibid., p. 91.
3 ibid., pp. 92–3.
4 ibid., pp. 157–69.
5 Rick Altman, "The American film musical: paradigmatic structure and mediatory function", in Rick Altman (ed.), *Genre: The Musical* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 197–207.
6 Starr, *Red and Hot,* p. 155.

7 Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, Ill./London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 162.
8 ibid., pp. 256–60.
9 Clark, *Soviet Novel,* p. 73.
10 ibid., pp. 140–1.
11 ibid., p. 119.

CHAPTER 13
Art and Propaganda in the Soviet Union, 1980–5

VAL GOLOVSKOY

The post-Stalin period was a time of significant change in the Soviet cinema. The annual production of feature-length films gradually rose to 150. Films for children received special attention, with up to twenty-five such films completed yearly. The number of animated films produced each year reached 100, if one includes those for adults, while the annual output of documentaries rose to almost 400. The latter type of film served as a particularly important vehicle for ideological messages.

The salutary reforms of the 1960s brought Soviet cinema out into the international arena, with works of directors such as Kalatozov, Bondarchuk and Chukrai, cameramen like Urusevskii and others. The so-called "thaw" of the late 1950s and early 1960s changed Soviet cinema so fundamentally that no subsequent "freeze" could return it to the conditions that prevailed during the Stalin era. The emergence of talented directors and screenwriters, together with a new generation of actors and a fresh beginning in terms of theme and style, all helped the cinema to regain the confidence of the public, and contributed to the leading rôle that films came to play in Soviet culture and ideology in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Films were regarded as crucial propaganda tools to be used in shaping individuals in accordance with communist doctrine. At the same time, owing to the lack of choice available to the Soviet public in terms of leisure and recreation, movie-theatres remained the principal source of entertainment. Attendance at the movies rose until 1968, reaching nineteen annual visits *per capita,* and then began to decline: 16 in 1978, 14.6 at the beginning of the 1980s. 264

Even though the overall level of the Soviet cinema in aesthetic and technical terms remained low, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed

the sporadic appearance of works produced by such talented individuals as Andrei Tarkovsky, Otar Ioseliani, Tengiz Abuladze and Marlen Khutsiev. Social problems of great importance were examined from a fresh perspective by directors Gleb Panfilov, El'dar Ryazanov, Ll'ia Averbakh and Dinara Asanova. New stylistic approaches were offered by Nikita Mikhalkov, the most significant talent to make a début in the 1970s—but unfortunately he was also the only significant one.

By the mid-1970s, Soviet cinema was becoming more diversified in terms of genre, with the production of large numbers of melodramas and films in the detective and adventure vein. The portion of annual output that can be said to have retained its value to this day constituted some 3–5 percent of the films produced.[1] At least two important factors contributed to the favorable development of the Soviet cinema in the mid-1970s.

Economic considerations in many cases began to take priority over ideological ones. With annual ticket sales of 4.2 billion, even the average price of 35 kopeks brought in very sizeable revenues. The problem of "commercial cinema" was reconsidered, and what had previously been labeled harmful and bourgeois suddenly acquired an entirely positive meaning. "Commercial films" were now referred to as films of popular or mass appeal, and contrasted to highbrow art for the élite. In addition, the spread of television to some degree freed cinema from its purely propagandistic function, thereby increasing the range of possibilities open to non-ideological films.

Television spread rapidly after the mid-1970s. By 1980 almost the entire population of the Soviet Union—89 percent in 1980 and 93 percent in 1985—lived within range of television transmitters.

But by the end of the 1970s negative factors began to affect the Soviet cinema, chief among them being a profound sense of stagnation linked to the general crisis affecting the Soviet economy and Soviet ideology in the closing years of the Brezhnev era. Ideological pressure on artists increased, together with petty-minded attempts to control every detail of their work. The range of free expression began to shrink, and every experimental work was suspected of undermining the system. And this, in turn, had immediate repercussions on the quality of the work produced. Some of the following films released between 1981 and 1985 deserve to be judged on their aesthetic merits. Others have become important facts of social history owing to the interest and controversy they

have aroused:[2] *On Vacation,* directed by Nikolai Gubenko (Mosfilm, 1981); *Kinfolk,* directed by Nikita Mikhalkov (Mosfilm, 1982); *Farewell,* directed by Elem Klimov (Mosfilm, 1982); *The Voice,* directed by Il'ia Averbakh (Lenfilm, 1982); *Station for Two,* directed by El'dar Ryazanov (Mosfilm, 1983); *Without Witness,* directed by Nikita Mikhalkov (Mosfilm, 1983); *The Train Stopped,* directed by Vadim Abdrashitov (Mosfilm, 1983); *Flying: Dreams and Reality,* directed by Roman Balaian (Mosfilm, 1983); *The Kids,* directed by Dinara Asanova (Lenfilm, 1983); *Afterward,* directed by Marlen Khutsiev (Mosfilm, 1984); *The Blue Mountains,* directed by El'dar Shengelaia (Georgia, 1984); *War-time Romance,* directed by Petr Todorovskii (Odessa, 1984); *Scare-crow,* directed by Rolan Bykov (Mosfilm, 1984); *Parade of Planets,* directed by Vadim Abdrashitov (Mosfilm, 1984); *Time of Desires,* directed by Iulii Raizman (Mosfilm, 1984); *Agony,* directed by Elem Klimov (Mosfilm, 1984; originally completed in 1975); *My Friend Ivan Lapshin,* directed by Aleksei German (Lenfilm, 1985); *Trial on the Road,* directed by Aleksei German (Lenfilm, 1985; completed in 1972, title had originally been *Operation Happy New Year;* and *Come and See,* directed by Elem Klimov (Mosfilm, 1985).

Despite the necessarily subjective nature of such a list, the selection reflects certain very real tendencies in the development of Soviet cinema. During this period, the average number of quality films produced per year was four, that is, 2.5 percent of the total annual output and considerably less than during the 1970s. What follows is an attempt to comment on certain aspects of the films listed.

The overwhelming majority of these films were produced at the studios of Mosfilm (thirteen of the nineteen) and Lenfilm (four). The studios of Georgia and Odessa contributed one film each.

The thematic emphasis continued to be on the contemporary scene. Of the nineteen films listed, fourteen have contemporary settings, three deal with the war and its consequences, in two the action takes place before the war.

After 1983, Andropov's attempts to restore order in the country by curbing drunkenness, eliminating corruption and tightening labor discipline began to find reflection in films that criticized so-called "negative phenomena". An article in the *Washington Post* about a Soviet film called *The Blonde Girl around the Corner* carried a characteristic title: "What's at the movies, Comrade?

Corruption."[3] The protagonists of such films, however, turned out to be salesclerks, copyeditors in a publishing house, and office workers, in other words "little people" who were hardly to blame for the collapsing economy. *The Blonde Girl* is not the story of the big-time crook who had been the manager of the Eliseev food-store in Moskow and had kept the party élite supplied with foodstuffs. It is, rather, about an unremarkable salesgirl named Natasha who, within the context of the so-called "second economy", lives according to the principle best expressed by "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours". In exchange for meat from her store, Natasha is able to achieve a relatively decent lifestyle. At the end of the movie, Natasha is sent off to some northern site to be "reeducated", but the authors do not treat her too severely. Some films of this type, in fact, have a double title to soften the criticism even more—for example, *The Blue Mountains; or, An Unlikely Story* and *A Swindler's Tale; or, Running in Place*.

Rolan Bykov's *Scarecrow* must be numbered among films of criticism. Rumor has it that it took the personal intervention of Gorbachev to get the film released for general distribution and for it to receive favorable reviews. The theme of cruelty by children is treated in terms of a random and insignificant episode—in contrast to the terrifying facts that find their way into the Soviet press—yet this was enough to alarm the bureaucrats of the cinema establishment. In a closed society even such strictly rationed criticism evokes a response that is entirely out of proportion to the actual aesthetic and journalistic merits of the work in question.

Great success was enjoyed by films where social problems have virtually no rôle, having been displaced by love or family dramas, or by tales of personal conflict. Works of this type include Marlen Khutsiev's *Afterword,* Nikita Mikhalkov's *Without Witnesses* and Petr Todorovskii's *Wartime Romance*.

Several films feature the motif of a railroad station, presented as an environment symbolic of the unsettled nature of Soviet society with its numerous material and moral problems. A Soviet viewer will always associate a station with long lines, delays, execrable food, a multitude of drunks and so on. This is indeed the type of station we see in Ryazanov's *Station for Two,* Pavel Chukhrai's *Canary Cage,* Mikhalkov's *Kinfolk* and Abdrashitov's *The Train Stopped*.

Just as in the preceding decade, very few films in the 1980s were based on first-rate literary works. One can name only the screen

version of Valentin Rasputin's *Farewell to Matera,* directed by Elem Klimov, and Aleksei German's film *My Friend Ivan Lapshin,* based on a short story of the same title written by his father, Yuri German. The film version of Yuri Bondarev's novel *The Shore,* co-directed by A.Alov and V.Naumov, can be considered only a partial success. The works of many talented writers have yet to be turned to cinematic use.

By the mid-1980s, the failure of "Operation Start-Up" had become apparent. This had been an attempt to induct a large group of young directors and screenwriters into the cinema industry, but of the young debutants of recent years—for example, Sirenko, Ermash, Shakhnazarov, Tumanishvili, Pankratov, Chukhrai—none can be said to offer much promise. Their work, in fact, hardly rises above the mean.

The series of films timed to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany turned out to be, even by Soviet press reports, no more than a poor imitation of old standbys, which were not of a high quality to begin with. In films like *The Battle of Moscow* or *Victory,* the departure from historical truth was accompanied by an exaggerated portrayal of Stalin's contribution.

Soviet cinema achieved success only in the sphere of the so-called "counter propaganda"—or, more precisely, anti-American—film. A party directive to produce such films was issued in 1984. The directive stated that Soviet cinema needed to produce films which "promote Leninist foreign policy, actively expose the aggressive designs of imperialism,…take into account the specific character of the current ideological struggle in the international arena, and heighten the vigilance of the Soviet people and their armed forces".[4]

A five-year plan was elaborated on the basis of this directive. The first fruit of this effort was M.Tumanishvili's *Incident on Grid 36–80,* the story of an accident aboard an American nuclear submarine. Leakage of radioactive material is imminent, and the crew of a Soviet ship stands ready to assist the Americans. The main idea of the film is that the threat of nuclear disaster emanates from the United States—the nuclear accident at Chernobyl had not yet occurred. The other goal of this film was to emphasize the might and the peaceful intentions of the Soviet armed forces. Tumanishvili has specialized in cinematic propaganda of this sort, and in 1986 he produced *Solo Voyage,* a

film that features a Soviet Rambo-like character who makes short shrift of Americans. The *New York Times* has noted that this movie contains extremely high levels of cruelty and violence, an unusual feature in Soviet cinema.[5]

Other anti-American films produced in 1985–6 include *Can-Can in the English Garden, Paris Drama, Flight 222, European Story, Contract of the Century, Victory* and *Mystery of Villa Greta.* Many of the movies were produced at the Dovzhenko Studio in Kiev and are marked by a very low level of artistic accomplishment —a point conceded even by Soviet critics. If one also considers the many anti-American films and documentaries shown on Soviet television, one can get an inkling of the anti-American sentiment that is being actively promoted by the Soviet media.[6] A few of those films that aired in 1986 include: *Rich Man, Poor Man, The Man from Fifth Avenue, From Chicago to Philadelphia.*

It is important to note that Soviet cinematography is increasingly out of date in purely technical terms: there is a lack of quality color film and of reliable sound-recording equipment, for example. Provincial movie-theaters are in a disastrous condition. Each film takes years to produce—a situation that suits the studios in the current economic circumstances. It is to their advantage to start production using a patently inadequate filmscript rather than risk underfulfilling the yearly quota of films prescribed by the central plan. The economic experiment undertaken in the 1960s by director Grigori Chukhrai was cut short.[7] The new hopes inspired by Gorbachev have induced Chukhrai to call for a return to this system in the pages of *Pravda.* As he put it, "a system that had been tested for ten years was rejected without analysis, while the new regulations, compiled in a slap-dash manner and based on the wrong assumptions, were introduced everywhere without testing of any kind. The result of such haste is obvious. Together with other representatives of Soviet cinema, Chukhrai also proposes to abolish the multi-stage editing process through which all scripts now have to pass. He further suggests that individuals who are incapable of working in the new manner be removed from their post.

The still brief post-Brezhnev period has been marked by an increased tempo of change in the cultural sphere. The overall pattern could be defined as a series of minor concessions together with the simultaneous attempt to reassert the ideological controls that had been loosened in the final years of the Brezhnev era.

The first attempt to articulate this policy was contained in the speech of Konstantin Chernenko at the Central Committee's plenary session on ideology in June of 1983. Chernenko here called for a closer adherence to the party line in cultural matters, and for greater dedication to be shown in the service of the communist cause. At the time this sounded like a dissonant note in what some naïve observers considered the "liberal" line of Andropov. In point of fact, however, this represented the general party line, nuances in which are of little consequence. The brief Andropov period resulted in the appearance of several "critical" movies like *The Blonde around the Corner* and *The Blue Mountains*. These films were released after Andropov's death and met with strong opposition from party officials who hoped that the accession to power of Chernenko would signal a return to the familiar patterns of the past.

A new attempt to address the crisis in the Soviet cinema by involving old party dogma was made in June 1984, when the Central Committee issued a directive entitled "How to raise further the artistic and ideological level of films and to strengthen the material and technical basis of cinematography". The document combined the standard enumeration of deficiencies with a list of corrective measures that were patently incapable of solving any problems, being no more than traditional tributes to the clichés of propaganda.

The long-simmering dissatisfaction of the motion picture industry at last found expression in May 1986, during the congress of the Union of Filmmakers. Demands were voiced here for abolishing censorship, for making changes in the structure of the system—for example, eliminating the editorial apparatus—and for introducing the principle of "economic stimulation".[8]

A newspaper campaign critical of the Goskino leadership preceded the convention. Articles by E.Gabrilovich, B.Metal'nikov and Iu. Raizman contained mild reproaches and upbeat calls for change, "I am convinced", wrote Gabrilovich, "that it is necessary to remove the manifold impediments that stand in the path of every motion picture. It seems possible that the film script and the film itself need only one editor who is authorized to make decisions, an individual who would be involved with the director from the beginning to the end of the film-making process. This must not be a bureaucrat afraid of all risk, but rather a colleague and a friend…." Together with the other authors, Gabrilovich is

here pointing to the fear of responsibility that has characterized the editors of Goskino.[9]

B.Metal'nikov called on authorities to show greater trust in the work of artists: "I fought in the war, and I have worked in the cinema for more than thirty years. One would think that I have earned the right to be trusted. I don't want some studio editor demanding that I soften or eliminate a sensitive episode from my film because he fears a reprimand, all the while citing his formal responsibility."[10] The call here and elsewhere was for greater independence of the studios from Goskino's close oversight of the production process.

Much harsher criticism of the party and government apparatus was voiced in the articles of several film directors published between November 1985 and April 1986. Vladimir Motyl' bluntly accused Goskino of falsifying cinema attendance data.[11] Rolan Bykov called for making a distinction between service to the people and attempts to please party bureaucrats.[12] Nonna Mordiukova, a prominent actress, related the aggravations suffered by the production group working on *The Quagmire,* and accused "the bosses sitting in their easy-chairs" who are "so concerned about losing their positions that they have only one thought in mind: that nothing in the film should rock the boat". The actress concludes that "as long as our cinema fears the truth, acting with needless timidity and circumspection, it will not be of interest to the people".[13]

Equally significant was the criticism levelled in *Pravda* at war films that had been released in connection with the fortieth anniversary of 1945—for example, *Victory, The Battle of Moscow* and *The Shore*. In the words of a staff writer, A.Plakhov, "It is sad to note the appearance of numerous films nominally celebrating the anniversary but actually profaning this sacred theme".[14] The influential film director Sergei Bondarchuk was taken to task both at the congress and in a series of publications for his dictatorial manner and his paternalism.

Yet it is important to retain a sense of proportion in evaluating criticism of this type, where a venting of the accumulated frustrations of twenty years does not touch upon the central issue of party control over art. The whole upsurge of criticism remains entirely within the bounds of Gorbachev's policy of purging those individuals and ideas which have brought all too obvious discredit upon themselves. Soviet historical precedent suggests that the latest

wave of hope and enthusiasm may soon give way to disappointment and apathy as literature and art again become obedient to the whims, tastes and demands of party functionaries. Blunt and didactic propaganda does have an audience in the Soviet Union. Here is a letter to the editor of *Sovetskii ekran* written by a viewer with such tastes: "We all know that cinema must not only expose imperfections, but that, more importantly, it must serve as a teacher, pointing out the way to overcome these deficiencies."[15]

But there is also a public that is interested only in entertainment. It is not by chance that any highly artistic film or one that poses complex problems is doomed to half-empty houses in the Soviet Union. The point of view of the entertainment-oriented type of viewer is well expressed in a letter published in *Pravda*: "People will simply refuse to see a film with a recruiting-poster title like *Come and See*. I am the first one who will opt out. I have enough problems at my work-place, and I have no desire to see all that violence."[16]

There remains the "thinking minority"—in the words of Aleksei German—for which the Soviet cinema produces practically nothing. Even the best films of recent years offer only *artistic journalism*: a true-to-life depiction of problems and conflicts, believable characters, realistic settings, and more or less decent acting. But all these films are designed solely to promote—or to criticize—certain ideas. It is not art that they serve, and they do not even set themselves the goal of being works of art.

It seems that Soviet cinema needs to be approached with a different yardstick, with the films being judged by the quality of the journalism and the level of propaganda and didacticism. Films such as *Kinfolk, Station for Two, Theme, Time of Desires, Scarecrow* and *The Train Stopped provide* invaluable insights into Soviet society and its problems, and they illustrate the limits of permissible criticism. The best of these films take us as far in the depiction of truth as is possible under the given circumstances, and they say a great deal about the situation of women in the Soviet Union, about the admissible level in the portrayal of sex and violence, or about the attitude toward the wave of slavophilism that is sweeping the country. Thus, *Scarecrow* deals with the cruelty of children, a theme not previously depicted on the screen. *Station for Two* presents a favorable portrait of a black-marketeer. *Afterword* and *Without Witnesses* are focused on the personal relationship of two individuals without any social context.

The appearance of films that directly—or, more frequently, in veiled form—present non-standard situations and solutions attests to the fact that party ideologues do not fully control the film-making process. At times they are forced to accept and support ideas that do not conform to the party line on all counts. They do so, however, only so long as basic principles are not challenged—for example, party control over art. Moreover, the ideologues understand perfectly well that new ideas will reach only the "thinking minority", a group which in Soviet conditions has no means of shaping public opinion.

In summary, the accession to power of Mikhail Gorbachev aroused new hopes of liberalization. The regime has indeed made a number of concessions of secondary importance. At the same time the criticism of deficiencies has proceeded strictly within the limits defined by the Party. The new spirit could be formulated thus: the period of stagnation is over, but the goal of freedom is as distant as ever.

NOTES

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1 For greater detail, see Val S.Golovskoy with John Rimberg, *Behind the Soviet Screen: The Motion-Picture Industry in the USSR, 1972–1982* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1986).

2 For a similar list of films released in the years 1970–81, see Val S. Golovskoy, "An analysis of Soviet cinema (1970–81)", in Golovskoy and Rimberg, *Behind the Soviet Screen,* pp. 138–44.

3 *Washington Post* (national weekly edition), 20 August 1984, p. 18.

4 *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 13 (1984), p. 2.

5 Philip Taubman, "Russians strike back with a Rambo of their own", *The New York Times,* 24 July 1986, p. 2.

6 Irving Wallace has written about the distortions that were introduced into his novel when it was produced as a three-part series for Soviet television : "What Soviet TV did to my novel", *TV Guide,* 19 July 1986, pp. 2–6.

7 As part of the trend of economic reforms fostered by Kosygin, an Experimental Studio was established in Moscow (1965–75), with Grigori Chukhrai as artistic director and Vladimir Pozner as executive director. The studio operated independently from both the

film-makers' union and Goskino, and was economically self-sufficient. It produced several box-office successes that even generated good revenues in foreign markets. In 1972, Goskino required that the Experimental Studio be incorporated into Mosfilm, and this practically marked the end of the period of experimentation.

8 See the account of the congress in *Sovetskaia kul'tura,* 17 May 1986, pp. 2–3. For a more detailed analysis of the results of the congress, see Luliia Vishnevskaia, "Elem Klimov—vo glave Soiuza Kinematografistov", *Radio Svoboda: Materialy issledovatel'skogo otdela,* RS 89/86, 20 May 1986.

9 E.Gabrilovich, "Tak khochetsia skazat", *Sovetskaia kul'tura,* 8 April 1986, p. 2.

10 B.Matal'nikov, "Pravda—nadezhda i opora", Sov*etskaia kul'tura,*1 April 1986, p. 3.

11 *Sovetskaia Rossiia,* 16 November 1985, p. 4.

12 Radio Moscow broadcast, 13 May 1986. Cited in Luliia Vishnevskaia, "Chto 'kormit' studiiu", *Pravda,* 14 February 1986, p. 3.

13 *Sovetskaia Rossiia,* 21 February 1986, p. 4.

14 A.Plakhov, "Naidet—kto ishchet", P*ravda,* 26 April 1986.

15 *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 3 (1984), p. 3.

16 *Pravda,* 26 April 1986. The film *Come and See (Idi i smotri)* was directed by Elem Klimov and produced by Mosfilm in 1985. It deals with German atrocities during the Second World War in a very naturalistic manner.

CHAPTER 14
Alexei German, or the Form of Courage

GIOVANNI BUTTAFAVA

Emerging from that strange and hidden Soviet reserve where films that had been shot but not released waited for a chance to come out, two works directed by the same director, Alexei German, have come to light at the inception of perestroika. They have been kept "hidden" for two, even fifteen y ears. It has thus been possible to examine one of the most original and symptomatic creative personalities in contemporary Soviet cinema, known up to now through a single film: *Twenty Days without War* (1976).

The son of writer Yuri German, who emphasized individual destinies in his works more than group prospectives—problems, conflicts and hardship more than calls to order, enthusiasm and harmony—Alexei German made his début at 29 at the side of the older and more experienced Grigori Aronov, then 44. The film was *The Seventh Traveling Companion* (1967), a film about revolutionary adventures revolving around a fairly unusual hero: a Tsarist general who finds himself alternately in the camps of Reds and Whites, and who realizes all the values he believed in have collapsed; a hero full of doubts and contradictions. German's central theme is already present: the instability of historical "rôles", the overturning of ideological certainties, the ungraspable complexity of the real.

When he is given the chance to direct a film on his own, his first real film, Alexei German uses as his inspiration the war prose of father Yuri (who died three years earlier, in 1967). Here he develops the most unusual and courageous themes linked to the revision of Manichaean rhetoric in Stalinist culture, which began at the end of the fifties. This process, although slowed down at the beginning of the seventies, irresistibly laid out several paths "intellectual work" was to take. These paths would lead to complex heterodox individual works like Andrei Tarkovsky's, and

a series of films that turned the ambiguity of everyday life into the subject of severe subtle investigation. Typical in this sense are certain Lenfilm directors, from Panfilov to Averbach, from Mel'nikov to Aronovich and Dinara Asanova. And Alexei German, we can now add.

The revision of the Khrushchev years, the new "opening", the "thaw", has had the irresistible effect of getting Western critics into the habit of seeking signs of "transgression" at all costs. When faced with a Soviet film, many Western critics seem unable to resist the temptation to apply a "courage-meter". A work is worth as much as its nonconformism in confronting official doctrinal catechism (historic, ideological, moral, spiritual). Each filmmaker is supposed to express himself or herself in a sort of battle with bureaucracy which tries to push directors toward celebratory orthodoxy; the goal of this battle would be to get across a theme, feeling or image that doesn't correspond to the bureaucracy's expectations. A director seems to be judged first of all for what he manages to "get through". And, anyway, many new directors and scriptwriters of the sixties seem basically stimulated by the "poetics of courage", the desire to say "that which has yet to be said", to reveal "that which has always been hidden", to demystify the reigning "official version". From this point of view *Trial on the Road* (shot in 1971, ready for release in 1986) is a typical example, perhaps the most typical in the whole of Soviet cinema of those years.

The three main characters (and the relationships that develop between them) are extremely revelatory of this will to overturn Stalinist perspectives, to risk a kind of schematism of anti-schematism. Lazarev, a former sergeant in the Red Army who became a collaborator for the Nazis in occupied territory, lets himself be arrested by the partisan division at the heart of the film because he wants to go back to fighting the Germans. He is, however, willing to undergo every test of courage, to submit to the inevitable humiliations, even to let himself be shot as a traitor—an almost unique character, the contrary of the classic screen "traitor". A classic character, on the other hand, is Petushkin, the stiff-backed major who is ready to sacrifice a boat with hundreds of Russian prisoners aboard in order to carry out a sabotage mission against the Germans (blowing up a bridge which the enemy is crossing, just as the boat passes beneath it). Because, as the leaders say, you can't surrender, you go on fighting to the

last man, and Petushkin—a fanatical formalist, who believes in military discipline without concession—finds comfort in the example of his son, who has died on the front hurling himself at a tank.

Finally there is the most nuanced and living character in the film: Korotkov, the commander of the partisan division, played with great finesse by the excellent actor Rolan Bykov. He is a simple man who trusts his own instinct and humanity more than the rules; informal, a great heart, adored by the men in his division. These soldiers, moreover, are presented with a total lack of rhetoric —old peasants, inexperienced, boys. Here again the clichés of the Soviet epic are overturned.

But overturning the rôles doesn't mean questioning the Soviet art of rhetoric, which is present, but used in a different way rather than refused. Certainly, that's already a lot, but the academicism of the *mise-en-scène* can't help but filter through and entrap German's "courage": making a "repentant traitor" the positive hero of the film is a sign of audacity, but paradoxically the final redemption scene—which takes place in an almost hyperbolic war-action sequence, with Lazarev alone picking off dozens of enemies with his machine-gun before he heroically is killed—becomes a convention of the genre. The same objection can be made to the unambiguous limning of Major Petushkin, who becomes a "villain" all too clearly, calling up the typical reaction toward the bad guy in the black hat. This is not to say they aren't real characters; what's lacking in authenticity and truth is the way they're handled. There are truly moving moments; for example the finale, with Korotkov stuck on the road to Berlin pushing a broken truck while all around him others drive calmly by, maybe even undeservingly; as humble as ever, he is a small pawn who has contributed, maybe without adequate recognition, toward victory.

But in its totality the general handling is in the tradition of the Soviet war picture. With rather anonymous talent, especially in the action scenes, German maneuvers his black and white Cinemascope camera slowly and a little pompously through the familiar snowy vast landscape. At the same time, the narrative structure is based on confrontations and key scenes, distanced from each other with professional efficiency according to the rather scholastic rules of Soviet genre dramaturgy. German's courage still hasn't hit upon its form.

In light of *Trial on the Road, Twenty Days without War* (1976), the only film of German's previously known, takes on new value as an index of the filmmaker's expressive taking stock, a moment of poetic reflection, a sort of pause to rethink things and distance himself from the rigid linguistic conventions of the Soviet war film. Taking as his basis the quiet meditative pages of Konstantin Simonov, resigned and sentimental to just the right degree, German takes leave of the framework of conflict and war, and explores hard, gray, heroically poor daily life far from the front. In place of the previous film's vivid photographic contrasts and sweeping pans, here the photography is monocolor, gray, almost dilettantish and faded (all praise is owing to the manificient work of cameraman Valeri Fedotov, who has admirably shot all of German's films). Here great passions, farewells, heroic women waiting for their fighting men are replaced by an idyll without past and without future. In place of poetic flashbacks, used so frequently in these films of the sixties and seventies as poeticizing devices and to introduce dynamic variations aimed at making a scene more "dramatic" (*Twenty Days without War is,* by its very nature, static and gloomy), the film prefers an indirect evocation of war tragedies and wartime. It uses witnesses gathered together with difficult but completely controlled detachment by the war-correspondent/hero on leave behind the front, and with him Alexei German, who has withdrawn from the flaming theater of extraordinary undertakings in *Trial on the Road* into a shadowy backstage zone of the severely ordinary. The human examples are less exceptional, not so new, maybe less courageously anti-conformists, but they gain in truth, in subtlety, until, minute fragments of a great tragedy, they form a social fabric, one much richer than the hero, the witness and "organizer" who at times seems unable to control it.

German, one might say, proceeds by steps, avoiding the most common pitfalls inherent in celebratory cinema, removing color, overemphasized conflicts, academic heroism, slogans. He even avoids heroicizing the "little big man", which he gave himself over to so enthusiastically at the end of *Trial on the Road*. This sense of restraint is obvious in the more nuanced or articulated psychological relationships, the "great problems" dealt with *only* in their everyday implications, the moral rigor put to the test by existential complexity, downplaying sentiments, etc. This restraint links German to the "Leningrad line" of the last years; in fact it

makes him one of its most exemplary models. In one very eloquent scene, we're taken to a film set where a typical film of the period is being made, exuding falsity and rhetoric. In contrast to that parody stands a small town behind the front and its inhabitants. And German's film, in every way, is in contrast with this rhetoric, thereby running the risk, inherent in this kind of cinema, of taking its own project of expressive truth too literally. In contrast to the fiction proposed by official cinema (of those years—but maybe not just of those years) is the program of "reality", a softly modulated reality that tends toward pastels, toward gray. A reality that is supposed to be "faithfully" photographed by this quiet "true" cinema.

In *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1982, released in 1984) there's a similar confrontation between reality and fiction, another declaration of poetics. In the northern Russian town in which the story takes place, in 1935, a company of actors arrives to perform a poor agitprop theater piece. The actress, heroine of the film, has to play the part of a redeemed criminal, a prostitute who pays her debt to society by working on a canal. Ivan Lapshin, chief of the local police, organizes an encounter between the actress and a real ex-prostitute, a human prototype who is supposed to teach the actress the truth about the character. This is an extremely strong sequence: a catastrophic impossible encounter of two languages, two worlds, two ways of living and understanding life.

German has taken a decisive step in respect to the preceding film. In contrast to the "official version", aD colors, sweeping gestures and big words, there isn't "life", as seen in the previous film with its absence of violent signs, its black-and-white severity, natural and contained acting. No, here in contrast to the actress (and her fiction, her schematically expanded and exaggerated performance) is "another actress" who acts her own part in the story, wildly and naïvely. Consciously—and here lies the greatness of the last German—"life", a turn-around of the Stalinist "fiction"—is another "fiction". It's not the everyday asceticism of the "Leningrad line" as emerged in *Twenty Days without War,* but other colors (sepia tones, for once not used as a mawkish retro expedient), other gestures (extreme ones, at the limits of hysteria, of a nervous breakdown), other words (the same kind of professions of socialist faith, but angry, instinctive, raw). In contrast to the Form, imprudently assumed as the only one possible, with a switch of sign *(Trial on the Road),* now German

uses a non-Form, the conscious and systematic cancellation of its distinctive signs *(Twenty Days without War)*. *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* is the creation of another form. The form of courage.

1935. A provincial town in the great Russian North. The offices and habitation of the town's police force, under the direction of Ivan Lapshin. An apartment without definite form, where an indefinite number of people are living together. Signs of the time. Someone mentions the Civil War, another sings revolutionary ditties, an old lady mops the floor and grumbles, another imitates an Italian aviator in Ethiopia; others drink, eat, sleep, exercise, weep. The structure of the apartment is never clear; the rooms are divided by pieces of plywood, false dividing-walls. In any corner, behind a piece of furniture, a bed may lie. Long takes show the precariousness, the amorphous structure of the space: an imprecise number of doors, both original and artificial, appear in each shot; from every corner of the wall a head may pop out; the guests-tenants, either fully clothed in boots and coats or in their underwear, enter and exit from the frame with unheard-of freedom and frequency. The toilet can become the theater of a suicide. The table is ready to receive black bread, pickles, poor man's food from who knows where, soup with pieces of paper floating in it, home-made vodka that goes to your head at once. Around the table, a variable group of persons intone pitiful military songs, tell anecdotes, make confessions, sometimes overlapping each other so much they're almost unintelligible. The film's open structure is reflected in the open and unforeseeable structure of Lapshin and his friends' apartment. They gather, they disperse, marry and leave the original nucleus, separate and return. Anyone can arrive, sit down, stay; anyone can go. Anyone can stay everywhere; anyone can walk away, disappear.

The town is infested with Solovev's gang. Solovev is a dangerous criminal whom Lapshin has been doggedly chasing for years, and who theoretically is supposed to be the principal theme of the story. But news about Solovev's gang only arrives a third of the way into the film, then to vanish for a long time, submerged by other narrative and formal developments. It re-emerges in the sensational subclimax with Lapshin's men encircling the gang in a miserable overcrowded farmhouse, full of noisy human derelicts who are impressively coarse and unmannered. Lapshin corners Solovev, who in the mean time has struck once again, like a ferocious wild animal caught between other animals, unhappy

accomplices. The hand-held camera roves around greedily and shamelessly, breaking the rules of academic entertainment. Solovev realizes he can't hold out any more and surrenders, but Lapshin mows him down without a second thought. An unexpected, "informal" gesture, but a possible one; as possible as another. The violence is illegal in substance and form; in any other context, the gesture would be impossible without particular psychological and narrative developments that begin from the first appearances of the hero. (Here the only notations in this sense—namely, the nightmare-memories of the plane accident that kept Lapshin from having a more brilliant career—are the only false notes, too studied and artificial.)

In this sort of supreme formal anarchy, summary justice, the execution of Solovev, is a last narrative hypothesis, a perfectly homogeneous invention. Nor does the love-story proceed at a normal rhythm with dramatically articulated developments, according to the rules. The actress who tenderly, regretfully refuses Lapshin's attentions because she's in love with his friend, the intellectual on the way down, could just as well respond positively to Lapshin's proposals, and nothing would change. Every development is possible. There's an anguishing yet exalting sense of precariousness, of mobility, of ethical, ideological, sentimental fluctuation in the philosophy of German's story. And in his new aesthetics project.

Like much of recent Soviet cinema, the film repeatedly returns to a flashback structure, with a prologue and epilogue, accompanied by the off-screen voice of a witness who was at that time a 9-year-old boy. The flashbacks illustrate the theater of action in the thirties today in 1984 (thus in color, with our new signs of the times). But the current frame doesn't serve to confer any real tenderness to the memory, or to connote it sentimentally, ideologically, or even formally. Nor does it serve to glorify, or even to justify, the present, the "leap forward". It serves, first of all, to give a feeling of truth to the testimony. Not autobiographical, however, in the strict sense of the word (Alexei German was born three years after the year he set the action, 1935). The flashback structure serves, if anything, to reconfirm and repropose the theme of the passage of "direct" testimony from generation to generation, from father to son, even if both the boy-witness and the father are secondary figures, silent mediators of a historic moment that towers over them and goes beyond them. Once again

the film is based on pages by Yuri German, and only in that sense is it autobiographical.

At the end of the film, after the catharsis and the catastrophes, the "return to the future" from the Stalin-period town, from the poverty and marching bands ("There's an orchestra for every inhabitant"), to the same city fifty years later, isn't the return to a more livable, more comfortable, more judicious contemporaneity. Today the city has asphalt, they say, but no metropolitan symphony follows even the top brass there. Today there are lots of streetcars, buses, trains, modern and efficient means of transport; back then there were only two trams—tram number one and tram number two. With Stalin's face over them. German doesn't try to approach the new city, almost as though he were afraid of having to assume a celebratory tone. He contemplates it from afar. The colors don't get brighter, don't ring out. The voice of memory is tender, but firm.

CHAPTER 15
Scarecrow *and* Kindergarten: *A Critical Analysis and Comparison*

ALEXANDER GERSHKOVICH

The more an artist is worried by the problem of *how* his picture will be perceived by the public, *what* the critics will say, *how* the "authorities" will look on it, the greater the danger that the artist will deviate from the truth, and from his original conception, and the further he will be from the search for truth in art and from the sensitive questions of his time. And, as a result, the less will be the social impact of his film.

And vice versa. If an artist is guided by his inner convictions, by the interests of art itself—if, in the process of creation, he does not look back and worry about taking risks, does not deviate from his principles, does not think about what sort of impression he is making—everything within him will be in harmony, the moment of enlightenment or inspiration will come, and with it success.

Before his departure for the West, in the workers' auditorium of a Moscow factory, where the screening and discussion of *Mirror* was held, Andrei Tarkovsky was asked angrily: "For whom did you make this film?" The director answered sharply: "For myself. And for my friends."[1] The audience was indignant. People thought that they had caught the artist red-handed. It did not occur to them that the courageous director had revealed the secret of how real art is created and had hinted at how it should be viewed.

The utilitarian approach to art has a long tradition in Russia. According to it, art is only a secondary means in the struggle of ideas, especially in a country which lacks democratic freedoms.

The heightened social function of Russian art, which can be explained completely by historical circumstances, often deprives the artist of his immediate goal—the service of art itself. Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov spoke out against utilitarianism in their time,[2] but their efforts were in vain. Under Soviet conditions, the official function of art has grown to unhealthy

dimensions, and has taken the form of an official canon. One does not have to go very far for examples. At the most recent Congress of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR in December 1985, the Union's permanent secretary, the poet Sergei Mikhalkov, even entitled his summary report "The task of the Party is the task of literature", as though literature and art did not have their own tasks and concerns separate from those of the single political party in the country.[3] Just as in earlier times, the thought that art is only an illustration of political schemes and slogans is hammered into the social consciousness. Under these conditions, it is incomparably more difficult for an honest Soviet artist to struggle through to the truth than it is for the Western artist to do so, even though the West has its own set of problems.

The two films that I propose to analyze and compare, Evgenii Yevtushenko's *Kindergarten* and Rolan Bykov's *Scarecrow,* give us ample material for this sort of reflection. They were made by artists of the same generation; at the same time; at the same studio; appeared on the screen practically simultaneously, in 1984; strictly speaking, they elaborate on the same theme: difficult childhoods. Both films aroused wide public responses. None the less they differ sharply, in some crucial senses even contradicting one another.

One cannot blame everything here on the "censor". After all, both films were made in identical ideological conditions, within the bounds of the same system. Why, then, is it that in the case of *Scarecrow* even Bykov's opponents could not deny the truth of his portrayal of life, while in Yevtushenko's *Kindergarten* half-truths, sublimated, ennobled and prettified lies wink knowingly at us from the screen throughout the entire narrative?

Yevtushenko himself has called his film "my *Amarcord*", referring to Fellini's famous film.[4] The Italian director had attempted to look at his own childhood through the eyes of a child, one for whom many of life's correlations were incomprehensible, especially in the sphere of politics. Nowhere does the author impose on his boy hero general conclusions, observations or impressions which would be unnatural to his age. Fellini's film is transparent, naïvely wise, understated, and free of all didacticism.

In Yevtushenko's film the world is viewed by a boy named Zhenia, one who bears a remarkable resemblance to today's ideologized smoothed-over-by-life Yevtushenko. The hero of the film is in a sense an unnatural combination of grandson and

grandfather. He behaves like a grandson, but thinks, observes and generalizes like a true grandfather. The subject of the film is simple; it can be encountered repeatedly in the works of the talented poet in other, purer forms (for instance, in the narrative poem *Winter Station*). In the difficult year of 1941 the boy Zhenia is evacuated, together with his violin, to his grandmother's home in a remote Siberian village. His adventures and observations on the way are the subject-matter of the film. There are beautiful poetic sequences: the send-off of the soldiers from the village to the front, a village wedding, a Russina bathhouse. But this is also seen through the eyes of the adult author, rather than through those of the young hero. The naked Russian beauty running from the bathhouse into the snow is scrutinized minutely by the camera with the eyes of an experienced appraiser.

Yevtushenko's film is made in accordance with a typical Soviet canon: at the end of the picture his hero, as good and soft as clay, turns into a conscientious patriot and goes off to the front to the music of a gypsy tambourine. The film's beginning is also quite absurd. Through Red Square march ranks of Soviet soldiers, carrying aquariums with fish in them in place of submachineguns. The soldiers are singing the song "Do the Russians Want War?", which pertains to an entirely different time. Before our eyes politics is substituted for art, and a second objective of the film is created: a game with the official dogma. The point here is not simply in the total politicization of Soviet life. It is, rather, that in these conditions the particular material called art stops recreating itself and engenders the hybrids of pseudo-art. The author wanted to please both the audience and the authorities, to create a certain second reality that would have reconciled truth with falsehood, official dogma with the sense of the beautiful that lives in the consciousness of people. Art will not tolerate this duality, and we do not believe that the boy Zhenia is marching across Red Square with a herd of well-fed cattle in the autumn of 1941, for to drive cattle through an enormous city is madness. We do not believe that he is so stupid as to release pet fish into the ice-cold Moscow river, do not believe that in the crowded station his attention would be drawn to the figure of an elderly Jew reading the Talmud, do not believe in the abundance of the wartime Siberian market, in the romantic portrayal of the den of thieves, in the bearhunt by women, nor in many other things, including the film's completely false apotheosis: "Do the Russians Want War?"

In the context that interests us here, Soviet films can be divided conditionally into those that are made with cautious glances backward (at the audience, at the critics, at the ideological demands of the day), and films without that backward glance. The latter are in the evident minority and have appeared only in the post-Stalin period, probably beginning with S.Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* and M.Kutsiev's *I Am Twenty,* a film that was denounced by Khrushchev.

Rolan Bykov's Scarecrow belongs to the rare number of the latter type. The film is totally unique in the history of the Soviet cinema. It is impossible to find a grain of falsehood in a single sequence, not because the director has cleverly camouflaged or hidden it, but because it is simply absent. An artist does not deal in conscience, either wholesale or retail. He stubbornly holds out for the right to create by his own laws. And achieves it. From this point of view one seeminly transitional episode has great significance. After the terrible occurrence that shocks the school, the children are returning to class. By the entrance they are greeted by the woman principal, who is shown in a particularly foreshortened close-up. She dispenses sugary smiles and, like a parrot, repeats the words "Good morning, good morning". The gap between what we have witnessed and this official display, personified by the wax-like lifeless figure, is shocking and becomes a symbol of ambiguity. The film authorities demanded that this episode be cut, and delayed release of the film, but the director held his own and prevailed.

Bykov's film is modest in its expressive resources, in some ways even timid. The action remains within the boundaries of the old Russian town, with its deserted church, cobblestone road, dilapidated houses, and ravines. It is a film about a 12-or 13-year-old girl, who was the only one in town that could not and did not want to lie. Because of this, she is burned at the stake by her peers like a little Joan of Arc. Of course she was not burned physically — after all, we are living on the threshold of the twenty-first century—but she was burned in effigy. That they burned her only symbolically does not change anything. Boys and girls in red Pioneer kerchiefs, brought up on falsehood, burned Truth at the stake for the sole reason that it was not the way they wanted to see it!

They are led by a little girl with piercing eyes. The children call her "Iron Button". She is a born leader, having mastered early the

demogaguery of adults: "The collective is always right!" she proclaims.

Bykov's film, to a considerable extent, is a victory of the director over himself, over the disintegrating idea of the social hero. He stubbornly searched for an appropriate protagonist. When he was introduced to the 11-year-old Kristina Orbakaite, he turned her down decisively, putting three thick minuses next to her name. He was searching for an open, pretty, naïve being, similar to the charming little girl with the neatly pressed Pioneer tie who had recently travelled to the United States and had won the hearts of many Americans with her easy sociability and by the fact that nothing in America surprised her except McDonald's. On television she had given spirited advice to Americans about how they should fight for peace. Kristina, on the other hand, was awkward, reserved, uncommunicative. The director was looking for a soft, pliable, unformed character. Kristina had stubbornness, inner strength. She did not want to change herself, did not want to experiment to the tune of someone else's promptings.

Summing up his quest for the character, Bykov wrote:

> I searched at length for a little girl with naïve eyes, but they happened to be a rare commodity and came in two varieties: one was naïveté tending toward underdevelopment, the other was five minutes of conversation with "naïve eyes" and you would realize that you have been twisted ten times around her finger without a peep from you. I was stunned! Naïveté has become only a disease or a pretence…. I made what was practically a psychological discovery: in our time purity and naïveté possess different "facial characteristics".[5]

At that point the director remembered the three minuses he had given to Kristina. One might say that Bykov did not find Kristina but, rather, reached her through much suffering. It did not even have anything to do with talent, although without a doubt she was talented; it had to do with the fact that he discovered a new type of protagonist, one with a new guiding principle—*hidden* courage and *open* goodness. The conflict which she would have to act out demanded inner strength and moral wholeness. One does not often meet with these qualities in today's world, and even less so in societies where "the collective is always right". Kristina Orbakaite taught many people a lesson.

The ending of the film is very important. Outwardly it would seem that it was made according to the Soviet canon: Truth triumphs, evil is punished. The children and their teacher acknowledge the small feat of Lena Bessol'steva, who was incapable of lying, and accept her back into their midst. But the "happy ending" is illusory. Under the hand of Bykov it acquires a special dramatic tension. The girl leaves her home town. The truth for which she had suffered forces her to break with her surroundings. Nothing unites them any more: "I was on the bonfire," says the film's heroine, explaining her isolation from the other teenagers.

In the closing scene the camera shows us the cheerless shore of a Russian river, the deck of an old vessel, and Lena with her grandfather, played with striking warmth by the wonderful Russian actor Iurii Nikulin, a famous clown in the Soviet circus. They sadly leave their native places. They leave victorious and at the same time defeated—after all, everything in the town where their lives as well as the lives of their ancestors had passed stays the same.

And once again, as in the beginning of the film, the military band of boys with crew-cuts in stern uniforms begins to play. The band is conducted by a plain man with sad eyes. His part is played by the author of the picture.

What was the public response to the appearance on the Soviet screen of these two films? Yevtushenko's showy work passed without leaving a mark, in the manner of the usual falsification. The critics (Iu. Nagibin, R.Iurenev) rightly judged it a creative failure of the poet-director.[6] Bykov's modest film, on the contrary, aroused a veritable social storm, the likes of which Soviet cinema had not seen in a long time. Popular opinion was divided. Cinema fans—of whom there are millions in the Soviet Union—split into two opposing camps. The arguments were really not about the film itself, but about the attitude toward truth in art.

Out of thousands of letters which the director Rolan Bykov received after the appearance of *Scarecrow,* forty-nine, as he himself admitted, took him to task not because he "lied", but because he had shown the truth. I quote:

> Mosfilm. To Roland Bykov. You are not capable of making a film; you would do better not even to try. For *Scarecrow* you should be put behind bars.... What are you teaching

> children? How is it possible in our time, under our Soviet government, to show juvenile delinquents unpunished and after that to keep wearing the Pioneers red scarf as if nothing had happened? And what do you and your conductor's baton have to do with anything? From T.T.Bykova of Stavropol.

Another letter came from ten residents of Odessa, who gave no return address:

> We saw the film *Scarecrow*. First of all, we got a headache, and secondly, who was it that made this film? Do we know who? How could it have been released? If, God forbid, it should end up overseas they will say, "There you see a Soviet school, what they teach and where the teachers are. Just think, they drove a little girl to the point that she decided to jump into a bonfire." So remove that film from the screen and don't release any more like it.[7]

In Soviet art of recent times it is customary to blame all of the sins of the artist on the censor. But the strange thing is that Yevtushenko and Bykov have worked in identical conditions, in the same historical period, and virtually on the same theme. Both these two artists differ in talent and world-view, and therefore the final products and their impact are different. Their films were reviewed by the same agencies, and the demands they had to meet were seemingly identical—why, then, is it that hypocrisy and lies emerge from the hands of some, while disturbing truths are produced by the others?

Obviously, it is not a matter of external circumstances alone; rather, of the inner world of the artists, of their capability to free themselves from self-censorship. Elem Klimov, the head of the Filmmakers Union at the dawning of the era of *glasnost,* formulated the new artists' credo: "It is time to be brave!"[8]

NOTES

1 For more detail, see "Proshchan'e s zonoi", *Novoe Russkoe Slovo,* 13 November 1984, p. 5.

2 F.M.Dostoevski! spoke against the utilitarianism of the "dealers in art" in the argument with the followers of Chernyshevskii's aesthetic in his *Diary of a Writer* (1873).

3 For more detail, see Alexander Gershkovich, "S'ezd ofitsial'nykh pisatelei", *Novoe Russkoe Slovo,* 25 January 1986, p. 5, also "Dve literatury v odnoi strane", *Russkaia Mysl* (Paris), 18 April 1986, p. 6.

4 See the interesting article by Nancy P.Condee and Vladimir Padunov, "Children at war", *Frame work,* no. 30–1 (1986). I must state, however, that I cannot agree with the thesis of one of the authors of this article, Vladimir Padunov, that the heroine of the film *Scarecrow,* by taking on the guilt of others, also commits a false action. It is precisely this *conscious* action by Lena Bessol'ntseva for the sake of truth which in my opinion transforms her into a tragic figure.

5 Rolan Bykov, "Do i posle Chuchelo", *Iunost',* no. 9 (1985), p. 91.

6 See, for example, the article by R.Iurenev, "Neudacha", *Sovetskii ekran,* no. 19 (1984), pp. 8–9.

7 I quote from Bykov, "Do i posle Chuchelo", pp. 86 ff.

8 "Kino ne mozhet zhdat'", *Pravda,* 9 August 1986.

CHAPTER 16
The Cinema of the Transcaucasian and Central Asian Soviet Republics

LINO MICCICHÉ

The Soviet Union is certainly not the only "multinational" country in this world [the time of writing is 1986]. In Asia, we have the case of India: twenty-two states, two large language-groups (Aryan and Dravidian), and 179 different spoken languages, thirteen of which are officially recognized as "constitutional languages". In Europe, to take another example, we have the case of Spain: with different ethnic groups and languages, such as Castilian, Catalan and Basque—to quote only the three major ones. Let us take another example from Africa. We all know about the tragedy of racism and apartheid in South Africa, a country where the population is subdivided into whites (speakers of English and Afrikaans), Indians and African blacks, the last further divided into at least four or five large ethnolinguistic groups. To a certain extent, we could also point to North America: Canada, which is partly "English" and partly "French" (not only in Quebec); and even the United States, where many different races and ethnic groups coexist, though they are not concentrated in specific regions or states.

However—though it may seem strange in what is often considered one of the most centralized states in the world—there are few countries indeed like the Soviet Union, where the internal subdivision into "nationalities" reflects the existence of radically different ethnic groups, whose history has followed separate (if not conflicting) paths for centuries and centuries, and whose languages belong to "groups" and "families" extremely remote from one another. From ethnic, cultural and linguistic points of view, a Russian living in Moscow is much closer to a Frenchman living in Paris than to one of his Soviet countrymen living in Turkmenistan. The latter, in turn, once again from ethnic, cultural and linguistic points of view, is closer to a Turk living in Ankara than to a Soviet

inhabitant in Dushanbe, Tadzhikistan; while a Soviet citizen from Dushanbe has definitely more in common (ethnically, culturally and linguistically) with an Iranian from Tehran than with Soviet citizens in the relatively close-by city of Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In short, if we consider the fifteen autonomous republics that form the Soviet Union, and also take into account the existence of autonomous regions *(avtonomnye oblasti)* and autonomous districts *(avtonomny kraia),* we can reckon that there are 180 different "nationalities" within the country, each with its own language belonging either to the Indo-European, the Uralo-Altaic or the Caucasian group. This is what makes the "multinational" nature of the Soviet Union unique among other countries of the world.

This leads me directly to the following point. Again, the Soviet Union is not the only country in the world where the cinema is in fact made up of many different national cinemas. In India there is Bengali, Tamil, Malayam, Telugu, Marathi, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Hindi, Assemese and Urdu cinema; in Spain there is not only the mainline predominant production of Castilian cinema, but also the autonomous experiences of Basque and Catalan cinema; in Switzerland the differences among the films produced by the German-speaking, French-speaking and Italian-speaking cantons are not only of a linguistic nature; in Canada the English-speaking and French-speaking "québecois" cinemas have followed different routes, and looked to different models; different national variants exist in the cinema in China, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the United States ("chicano" films), and of many other countries. But in no other country has the history of filmmaking followed so many parallel and independent routes as in the Soviet Union. Each of them is a cinema in its own right, with its own ethnic, cultural and linguistic background; each is inevitably correlated to the others but basically separate, both formally and in substance.

In other words, the greatest originality of Soviet cinema, its most fruitful, incomparable and fascinating feature, lies precisely in its multinational structure. Before and above any other cultural, ideological, aesthetic or historical considerations, Soviet cinema is already different from the cinema of any other country in the world owing to this very unusual, and to certain extent unique, peculiarity (with the sole and partial exception of India, on a different level).

In fact, despite the strong central control exercised by the Moscow Goskino, despite the authority possessed by Mosfilm and Lenfilm, which is undoubtedly greater than that of any other studio, the subdivision into fifteen national cinemas is in itself the greatest source of dialectics for Soviet cinema, giving rise to the blossoming of a great variety of products. I do not mean to suggest that such *variety and dialectics* are results specifically intended by the policy of planning that is practiced even in this sector of Soviet society. I mean quite the opposite: *variety* and *dialectics* are the *happily inevitable* result of the multinational structure of Soviet cinema, independent of the "pan-Soviet" goals of central planning and of the centralizing attitude of Goskino.

Let us now begin to outline a few points of difference and similarity among the cinemas of the fifteen Soviet republics. We can identify at least five groupings. Every group (except one) comprises the cinemas of a certain number of republics, which share several similarities in relation to the other groups, in spite of their own internal differences.

(1) *Slavic cinema* (Russia, Belorussia, Ukraine). This is the strongest group in terms of production, audience, and support structures, as well as being the one with the oldest and most conspicuous historical tradition. There are a number of differences within this group, but they are not very marked.
(2) *Baltic cinema* (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). The three Baltic republics were annexed only in 1940, and the history of Soviet Baltic cinema is therefore more recent; its influence on overall film production in the Soviet Union is very limited. However, we should point out here the ethnic and cultural differences existing between Latvian-Lithuanian culture (Baltic languages) and Estonian culture (Ugro-Finnic language). Such differences are clearly reflected in the cinema of these regions. We must also note the influence exercised by the cultures and cinemas of Finland, Sweden and Poland, as well as by Catholicism, which is the most widespread religion in the Baltic region.
(3) *Moldavian cinema*. It is the only region in the Soviet Union where a Neo-Latin language is spoken (Romanian), and the ethnic and cultural basis is also Neo-Latin. The very specific character of Moldavian cinema, and its isolation, has been reinforced by historical developments similar to those in the

Baltic republics. In other words, Moldavian cinema took its first steps only in the postwar period (1947).

(4) *Central Asian cinema* (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tadzhikistan). Here we must first of all take into account the ethnolinguistic and cultural differences between the four republics whose languages are akin to Turkish, and which have felt the influence of Ottoman civilization (Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), and the Republic of Tadzhikistan, whose language and culture have more links with Persian civilization. Apart from this, there are naturally many other differences among the five cinemas of Central Asia, both in terms of cultural trends and levels of development.

(5) *Transcaucasian cinema* (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). Here the only common denominator is geographical: the Caucasus. Apart from this, there are different levels of development, and even greater differences in terms of cultural background and language (Azeri, the language spoken in Azerbaijan, is similar to Turkish; Armenian is an Indo-European language, possibly akin to Basque—Soviet linguists call it an Ibero-Caucasian language).

However, I want to make clear that this subdivision into five groups is mostly conventional. In fact, while the Slavic group is very compact from an ethnic and cultural point of view, the Baltic group should at least be further subdivided into Estonian cinema on the one hand and Latvian-Lithuanian cinema on the other. In the Central Asian group Tadzhik cinema should at least be separated from that of the other four republics. As for Transcaucasian cinema, the only point in common among these three republics is their place on the map.

It follows that the cinema of the fifteen republics of the Soviet Union can be subdivided into eight or nine groups, each including the cinema of either one republic only (as is the case for Azerbaijan, Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Moldavia and Tadzhikistan), or two (Latvia and Lithuania), three (Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine) and even four (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia). This subdivision is fairly well founded, from an ethnic and cultural point of view, though it does present a few contradictions. As for the five larger groups previously mentioned (Slavic, Baltic, Moldavian, Central Asian and

Transcaucasian), they are based on geographic, rather than cultural, criteria: their use is therefore merely conventional.

Despite this, we shall make use of this convention. We do so primarily because it reflects current usage in the literature about Soviet cinema, both inside and outside the Soviet Union. One could mention the seminar held in Tashkent in 1968 on 'Transcaucasian and Asian cinema"; or the theme of the 22nd Mostra Internazionale del Nuova Cinema, Pesaro, Italy, 1968, "The cinema of the Transcaucasian and Central Asian Soviet Republics"; or the International Forum on Baltic Cinema, Leningrad, 12–22 September 1986.

The first point I wish to stress is the objective importance of the cinema produced by the eight Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics in the general context of Soviet cinema. In 1984 these eight republics produced thirty-five feature films, sold 717 million tickets, and had a yearly attendance *per capita* averaging between a minimum of nine (Armenia) and a maximum of sixteen (Kazakhstan); in that same year, 26,400 screening units (including urban theaters, multipurpose rural screening facilities, and mobile cinemas) were in operation. In other words, the cinema of these eight areas is of considerable relevance both in terms of absolute figures (which are astounding when compared with the crisisridden Western film industries) and of its relative significance in Soviet cinema as a whole: it represents about a quarter of the overall annual film production, a third of the overall audience, and a fifth of the screening units.

Table 16.1 provides some figures for the year 1984 (the figures in brackets refer to 1968, by way of comparison). If we compare the figures for 1984 and those for 1968, we notice a slight upward trend in production (two to three more feature films), a slight decrease in *per capita* attendance (–2.4), balanced by a population increase that has produced larger absolute figures for overall yearly attendance (+107.8 million). Screening units (+7.76) have also increased.

The overall situation is therefore marked by considerable stability: quite far, for the moment, from the great crisis that has hit the cinema in the major industrialized countries, and that is felt in the Soviet Union, too, as far as urban attendance is concerned. Some useful figures on this point are provided in Table 16.2, which gives urban and rural attendance in four different periods

Table 16.1

(population) Republic (area mm^2)	Feature films 1984 (1968)	Yearly attendance per capita 1984 (1968	Overall attendance (millions) 1984 (1968)	Screening units (thousands) 1984 (1968)
(3,000,000) Armenia (29,800)	4 (2–3)	9 (11)	29 (25)	0.9 (0.69)
(6,000,000) Azerbaijan (86,600)	4 (4)	10 (9)	64 (44)	2.3 (1.73)
(5,000,000) Georgia (69,700)	8 (7)	10 (11)	53 (50)	2.1 (1.69)
(3,529,000) Kirghizia (198,500)	2 (3)	12 (14)	47 (40)	1.3 (1.01)
(14,685,000) Kazakhstan (2,713,700)	5 (4)	16 (20)	253 (256)	11.1 (8.07)
(3,801,000) Tadzhikistan (143,100)	3 (3)	10 (12)	42 (33)	1.3 (0.89)
(2,759,000) Turkmenistan (488,100)	3 (2)	13 (15)	42 (30.2)	1.4 (0.64)
(15,391,000) Uzbekistan (447,400)	6 (7)	11 (18)	187 (131)	6.0 (3.92)
TOTAL	35 (32/33)	average 11.3 (13.7)	717 (609.2)	26.4 (18.64)

(1960, 1970, 1980, 1984). The figures in parentheses refer to annual attendance *per capita*.

As Table 16.2 suggests, attendance figures have basically remained stable: they have increased in absolute terms, and the downward trend in terms of percentage is fairly limited. It can easily be seen that such stability is the result of a process whereby an overall decrease in urban attendance is balanced by the considerable solidity, or even increase in rural attendance. This

leads us to draw a first important conclusion. The southern republics of the Soviet Union—the three Transcaucasian republics and the five republics of Central Asia—are a very important pillar of the Soviet movie system, both in terms of structure (films produced, screening units) and of attendance (overall audience, yearly attendance *per capita*). Their very geophysical characteristics (limited urban development, large farms, vast countryside) in fact make these republics a potentially extended pool of movie demand, which—if encouraged by a correct supply-policy—could expand further, at least in the short and medium term. And in a number of cases this is already taking place.

Moscow tends to present an absolutely undifferentiated image of the cinema in these eight republics, as if each of them had achieved exactly the same level of development. This is particularly evident in the case of contacts outside the Soviet Union, though it is blatantly contradicted by all factual evidence. The reasons behind such an attitude are easily understood; it nevertheless represents wishful thinking, hardly backed by concrete reality. The facts indicate a clear supremacy of Georgian cinema over the others —a point that can be inferred simply by considering the figures on film production. Next comes Armenian cinema (among the Transcaucasian republics) and Uzbek cinema within the Central Asian group. This state of affairs has remained unchanged over the years.

Such ranking is quite natural, considering that we are talking not only of different nationalities, but also of different artistic achievement (in literature, painting, music, etc.) and of cultural traditions some of which are many centuries old, as in the case of Armenia and Georgia, while others took shape much more recently (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). Above all, however, we should keep in mind that in these republics the beginning of filmmaking dates back to very different periods.

In Georgia, for example, the first films were made before the Revolution (the silent movies *Berikaoba-keenoba,* by M.Kvialiashvili 1909; *The Conquest of the Caucasus,* 1913, a feature starring Georgian actors, and with a co-director and co-screenwriter from Tbilisi, Simon Esadze); while in Kirghizia, at the opposite end of the scale, the first films were made in the late 1950s (*My Mistake,* by Ivan Kobyzev, 1957, was the first movie entirely shot at Frunze; *Toktogul,* by V.Nemoliaev, 1959, was the

Table 16.2

	Overall attendance*				Urban attendance*				Rural attendance*			
	1960	1970	1980	1984	1960	1970	1980	1984	1960	1970	1980	1984
Armenia	16 (9)	30 (12)	29 (9)	29 (9)	11 (12)	22 (15)	21 (10)	21 (9)	5 (5)	8 (8)	8 (7)	8 (7)
Azerbaijan	39 (10)	56 (11)	62 (10)	64 (10)	28 (15)	39 (15)	39 (12)	38 (11)	11 (5)	17 (7)	23 (8)	26 (9)
Georgia	49 (12)	58 (12)	62 (12)	53 (10)	37 (20)	42 (18)	43 (16)	37 (13)	12 (5)	16 (6)	19 (8)	19 (6)
Kirghizia	28 (13)	44 (15)	47 (13)	47 (12)	15 (21)	24 (22)	25 (18)	25 (16)	13 (9)	20 (10)	22 (10)	22 (9)
Kazakhstan	166 (17)	284 (22)	253 (17)	253 (16)	85 (19)	136 (21)	119 (15)	119 (13)	81 (15)	148 (23)	134 (20)	134 (20)
Tadzhikistan	22 (10)	37 (13)	41 (10)	42 (10)	15 (21)	23 (21)	21 (16)	22 (15)	7 (5)	14 (8)	20 (8)	20 (7)
Turkmenistan	22 (14)	34 (15)	38 (13)	42 (13)	16 (22)	23 (21)	20 (14)	20 (13)	6 (7)	11 (10)	18 (12)	22 (13)
Uzbekistan	81 (9)	146 (12)	175 (11)	187 (11)	46 (16)	74 (17)	89 (14)	95 (13)	35 (6)	32 (9)	86 (9)	92 (9)

*Figures not in brackets:millions of tickets sold per year. Figures in brackets:average attendances per person in the given year.

Table 16.3

	Film production up to the end of 1968[1] (no. of films)	Film production up to the end of 1984[2] (no. of films)	First feature film produced within the Soviet State (date)
Armenia	80	144	1924
Azerbaijan	70	134	1924
Georgia	200	328	1921
Kazakhstan	60	140	1939 (1941)
Kirghizia	13	61	1955 (1959)
Tadzhikistan	35	83	1932 (1939)
Turkmenistan	37	67	1931
Uzbekistan	100	196	1925
TOTAL	595	1153	

[1] Official figures
[2] Estimates (based on the production average in the last three years, multiplied by 16–no. of years 1968–1984)

first Kirghiz film as such). These are substantial differences, as a result of which some "national" authors such as Nikolai Shengelaia, Ivan Perestiani and Mikhail Chiaureli from Georgia, or Amo Bek-Nazarian from Armenia, are prominent figures in the history of the "classic" Soviet cinema; while young directors like Tolomush Okeev from Kirghizia (*The Sky of Our Childhood,* 1966), or Bulat Mansurov from Turkmenistan (*Sostiazanie,* 1963), are classified among the "new wave" films of the 1960s.

Such diversity in the historical development and cultural background of filmmaking has necessarily brought about great differences among the eight republics in terms of styles of directing and cultural trends. As far as directing is concerned, we must first of all take into account the influence of Russian-language cinema, which dominates the screens all over the country with the bulk of its production: the more recent and inconspicuous and "national" tradition of filmmaking in a particular republic, the more profoundly its directors tend to be influenced by the theories and practice of Russian cinema. Consequently, national traits are much more evident and well developed in the cinema of those republics which have a long-standing tradition of filmmaking (such as Georgia, Armenia or Uzbekistan) than in the younger cinema, say, of Kirghizia or Kazakhstan. Furthermore, another important

channel through which the supremacy of Slavic (and particularly Russian) cinema makes itself indirectly felt is VGIK, the State Film Institute in Moscow, which has a fundamental rôle in the training of directors, screenwriters, actors and technical personnel for the film industry of the whole Soviet Union. Only Georgian cinema, in fact, has its own film institute, operative for some ten years, in the capital of the republic (the Film Department of the Shota Rustaveli Theater Institute in Tbilisi). A very good director such as Goderdzi Chocheli, for example (whose first film, *The Great Girlfriend Hunt,* 1985, was a fine movie indeed), was trained there.

As for cultural trends, differences in this field are even greater. An overall view of the cinema in the eight Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics suggests something in the manner of a division of labor between some of them and the Slavic cinema (mostly Russian, but also Belorussian and Ukrainian). It is as though the latter were meant to fulfill not only the usual task of producing narrative and/or lyrical films but also that of creating ideological models and teaching "political lessons". Conversely, films from the periphery are expected to perform a supporting rôle, going from the local variant of great general issues to the persuasive channeling of national consciousness into the larger political, ideological, multinational stream leading to Moscow. The national perspective, and even the ethnic and anthropological background of the characters, is thus often employed only as exotic scenarios and "costumes" for staging problems that are basically rooted in Moscow. Compared to the central products, these national features offer visual, or more seldom narrative, but hardly ever substantial variants. This is sometimes true even of the best films, though of course it does not apply equally to the cinema of all eight republics, but almost entirely to those which have not yet achieved a strong position of their own, because their filmmaking tradition is too recent, or their resources too poor. It does not at all apply to Georgia, for instance; quite the opposite. Consider the greatest Georgian filmmakers, such as Otar Ioseliani, or the two Shengelaia brothers, El'dar and Georgi: they offer a completely autonomous visual, ethnic and anthropological approach, while depicting problems and realities that are in no way merely "local" in relevance. In this respect, their work has an exemplary value which goes far beyond the borders of Georgia. Or consider two great poets of the cinema such as Sergei Paradjanov and Artavazd Pelesh'ian, and their films: Paradjanov's *Shadows of*

Our Forgotten Ancestors (1964), *The Color of the Pomegranate (1969), The Legend of the Suram Fortress* (1984); and Pelesh'ian's *We* (1968), *The Seasons* (1975), *Our Century* (1982). These are works of great beauty, deeply rooted in their own specific national culture, outside which they would become unintelligible; and yet their expressive power is such that it flows beyond any national borders. These are works absolutely capable of being compared with the best film products of the Russian tradition. Paradjanov, born in Tbilisi in 1924, made films in Armenia, the Ukraine and Georgia; Pelesh'ian, born in Armenia in 1938, has worked both in the cinema and for television.

Speaking of Georgian, Armenian and Uzbek cinema, we should not forget that their total production comprises some 668 films, amounting to almost 60 percent of the films produced in the eight republics since the creation of the Soviet state. With such a long-standing tradition of autonomous film production, these three republics have succeeded in avoiding the usual risks of "national" cinemas: skipping from genre to genre, finally creating a sort of "super genre" made up of local folkloristic variants to the plots, issues and ethnical-political themes of the Slavic cinema. Georgian, Armenian and Uzbek cinemas, on the contrary, have chosen their own autonomous styles and genres, as can be seen from the very open approach of "Georgian comedy" or the fixed patterns of "Armenian comedy" : neither can in any way be traced to the cinema of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev or Odessa.

Such a brief overview can offer only tentative conclusions. Nobody can deny the greatness of Russian cinema, and its relevance to the past and present history of filmmaking. Its objective supremacy over the cinema of all fifteen republics of the Soviet Union is undeniable, too, in terms both of quantity and quality. But the vitality and extreme variety of Soviet cinema is also to a large degree made possible by the cinema created in the Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics—each of them, even though Georgia is undoubtedly the most important one (again both quantitatively and qualitatively). At the time of writing, Tbilisi produces only eight feature films per year (to which should be added a number of cartoons, documentaries and "TV movies"). As national cinema this is one of the smallest, and yet this is one of the greatest "small cinemas" in the world, which can be proud of having produced four or five of the most outstanding film-makers of today. Such achievements, as well as those attained in Erevan

and Tashkent, are very positive results of the decentralization of cinema. This phenomenon may well be viewed by Moscow with a certain degree of concern—and yet it could become the point of greatest strength for Soviet cinema as a whole, just as it is certainly its most fascinating contemporary feature.

CHAPTER 17
Historical Time in Russian, Armenian, Georgian and Kirghiz Cinema

SYLVIE DALLET

Soviet cinema is most often represented on Western screens by Russian films that stress a voluntaristic and event-oriented vision of the world and of the national past. For this reason students of Soviet society have often drawn an analogy between communist values and the epic or didactic themes expressed in these films.

This standard view is valid for the Stalin era throughout Russian and non-Russian territory: for some thirty years, artistic creation was frozen into nationalistic and dogmatic propaganda. Historians are quite familiar now with the ideological mechanisms of this history: cinema is a fundamental issue of the contemporary world since it competes with the school-taught version of history. Nevertheless, ways of representing history have been diversified since the Second World War for two major reasons: liberalization of society since 1953, and emergence of cinema in the non-Russian republics. Soviet cinema of the early 1980s gives evidence of two characteristics: the heroic inspiration of Russian films wears away, and the vision of history in the non-Russian is usually limited to traditional and local philosophies. The Russian version of the past is based on the contrast between twentieth-century events and the inertia of a very literary nineteenth century. The southern and eastern republics describe peasant societies faced with destruction of social fabric by the inroads of urban civilization. These tendencies constitute effective counterpoints to socialist realism and indicate that the transmission of the collective past is undergoing a crisis.

RUSSIAN FILMS AND HISTORY

The narrative structure of Russian films usually follows a dualistic mode: a slow-moving plot on one hand and strenuous activity on

the part of the characters, activity presented as the characters' political choice. This dualism, quite characteristic of the last ten years, is the result of contradictions within the original inspiration. Transmission of the past depends on a double collective memory. The first one, literary and pessimistic in its inspiration, belongs to the "soul" or "nostalgia" of the nineteenth century; the second, political and optimistic, goes back to revolutionary, militant and Stakhanovite models. *Oblomov* by Nikita Mikhalkov (1979) illustrates the first tendency; while *Siberiad* by A.Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky (1976–8) is an example of the second. In both cases, the speech mannerisms of the different characters are important, either expressing the emptiness of human existence or serving to raise consciousness.

The Russian vision of history is, from the start, linear and event-oriented. Statistical study of topic-frequencies shows three decisive fractures: the Russian campaign undertaken by Napoleon in 1812; the Russian Revolution (Soviet power and Civil War, 1917–21);[1] and the Second World War, called the Great Patriotic War because official propaganda compares it with the war of 1812.[2] These three milestone events are rooted in the defense of national territory. Small wonder that the two national epics of the Stalin era, *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible,* were produced respectively in 1938 and 1944–5. This tendency is still apparent whenever a film production covers an extensive chronological period, as exemplified by films as varied as those of A.Tarkovsky (*Andrei Rublev,* 1965; *The Mirror,* 1974) or of A.Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky.

The persistence of struggles for the defense or the development of the national soil is traditionally associated with moral values such as mutual aid and courage. This long-lived topic survives for many historical and even geographical reasons: though it has become commonplace to mention alongside socialist issues the old pan-Russian imperialism, one should not neglect other factors such as territorial immensity and severity of climate. In this respect one can say that the structure of the traditional Russian narrative strongly resembles that of the traditional American narrative, "westerns" as compared to "easterns". They describe the initiation adventures (individually for the United States, collectively for the Soviet Union) of positive heroes who victoriously withstand the onslaughts of nature (the steppe, the elements, wild animals) and of foreign enemies (Indians, Tartars, Europeans). It is hardly surprising that

A.Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky chose America to produce two of his films (*Maria's Lovers,* 1984, and *Runaway Train,* 1986), while the Georgian O.Iosseliani prefers to set his *Les Favoris de la lune* (1984) in France. To this epic description of the individual corresponds a history of universal value: faced with the threat of Tartar horsemen or Hitler's panzers, the once Russian, now Soviet hero vigilantly constructs the future.

Nevertheless, the Russian cinema has since the 1970s neglected descriptions of Second World War battles. Film producers have probably moved away from descriptions of military events and civilian suffering owing to the passing of years, the tedium produced by topics illustrated time after time, and the novelty of problems in modern-day urban life. As early as 1959, Sergei Bondarchuk was brave enough to create an unhappy hero in *The Fate of Man*. Nowadays one of the few producers who still give preference to historical topics, Aleksei German, nevertheless keeps scrupulously away from official propaganda. Posing as documentaries (black and white or sepia/color), *Twenty Days without War* (1976) and *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1983/85) describe, respectively, the life of a soldier on his way to Stalingrad and the humble and lonely fate of the police officer Lapshin in an eastern province in the 1930s. The soldier, a former writer, while enjoying a short leave in Tashkent, is drawn against his will back into the hardships of civilian life: divorces, abandoned people, death and despair everywhere. Then, called upon to work as a scriptwriter on a war film, he revolts against the rigid militant propensity to describe only the heroic and monumental achievements. The critical tone of German's film made it impossible for him to leave the Soviet Union for ten years, while *My Friend Ivan Lapshin,* produced in 1983, was released only in 1985 thanks to the great popular success of the first of German's films in Paris.

Even the best film-directors have tried to escape from official emphasis on historical events. El'dar Riazanov and Nikita Mikhalkov evoke intimate tragedies, private intrigues that take place in a very literary nineteenth century, giving impressionistic descriptions of the immobility and the small pleasures of the Russian élite. *Unfinished Piece for Piano Player* (Mikhalkov, 1977), *Oblomov* (Mikhalkov, 1980) and *A Ruthless Romance* (Riazanov, 1984) partake of a similar inspiration.

This tone of immobility and sadness can be easily applied to the contemporary scene. Scripts devoted to modern society—with the exception of *May I Have the Floor* by G.Panfilov (1976)—tend to avoid all references to political institutions and denounce instead the incoherence of individuals in social life: psychological ills, consumerism, inertia and, in any case, the gloomy expectation of an uneventful future. Solutions hinted at are to be found in renewal of the couple rather than in collective ideals.[3] History is the big loser in this new tendency in cinema which describes an ossified and soulless society. It is hardly surprising that after making the necessary detour by evoking the Second World War mythology (*Ivan's Childhood*, 1962) Tarkovsky takes refuge in the mythical description of suspended time (the Middle Ages or the twenty-first century), enabling him to reflect upon the individual in all his fragility, crushed beneath the weight of a troubled universe. Events are perceived as unacceptable heresies. Europe has been quite receptive to Tarkovsky; but he, in turn, had no taste for Western civilization, which he found mercantile and vulgar in its avid search for material satisfaction. *From Andrei Rublev* (1965) to *Sacrifice* (a Franco-Swedish joint production, 1986) Tarkovsky expresses his rejection of the historical world.

Thus, one could say that the apparent diversity in the Russian way of representing history is in reality a binary phenomenon, one that wavers between a sort of disgust at the world inherited from fatalistic or Christian literature of the nineteenth century and the heroic accomplishments of the individual within society.

HISTORY IN NON-RUSSIAN CINEMA

Non-Russian film production not only finds its inspiration in indigenous literature—witness the success of the Kirghiz novelist Chingiz Aitmatov—but also gives a philosophical slant to its portrayal of the modern world quite unlike the dualistic political debate in Russian cinema. In resorting to tradition, either Georgian or Armenian (for the Caucasus) or Kirghiz (for Central Asia), the model of the urban *Homo sovieticus* is severely questioned. Both international and Soviet viewers have unanimously acclaimed films of this type; and distribution throughout the Soviet Union, thanks to Russian dubbing, has won for these republics a prestige far in excess of the numerical importance of their population (6 million Georgians; 3.5 million Armenians; 4 million Kirghiz).

This ideological mutation, notwithstanding the patent russification of students and officials, has not failed to upset the political establishment. Hence the opinion of Y.A.Bogomolov concerning "the egocentric tendencies of Georgian film producers, who create a world turned inwards in order to defend their particularisms".[4] This opinion, a severe one inasmuch as its author holds ultimate authority over scripts, has not been voiced—at least, not officially—since 1979. It would seem that the success of non-Russian films has direct bearing on this wait-and-see attitude on the part of the authorities. The Russian cinema, being one of the best in the world in terms of quality, is a precious cultural ambassador for the Soviet Union. Its relative freedom and quality (in the case of films shown in the West) reflect an encounter of ideas rather than any specific social reality, and are proof of success in a field that is particularly dear to the hearts of the official class: that of collective art.

The success of non-Russian films is attributable not only to the strangeness of the customs that they depict (exoticism), but also to the healthy philosophy and joy of life that they exude. This happiness proceeds from the traditional conviviality of rural communities, which did not experience serfdom in the nineteenth century and could therefore be in communion with the cycles of nature, notwithstanding wide religious differences (Christians of several persuasions, Muslims and pagans). They replace the socialist "ideal of life" with "ways of life" based on a more ancient cultural heritage. Enthnological demands thus compete, politically, with the Soviet model of development. In the last ten years such cultural demands have become an important new factor in the modern world,[5] but their expression varies according to the minority involved. Sometimes it is merely a means of challenging the dominant historical chronology in order to replace it with another more obscure and long-repressed chronology; battles are fought over historical records as well. In this case what takes place is not the revenge of one history on another, but political history getting progressively bogged down in a religious and philosophical tradition armed with secular weapons.[6]

Georgia has often willingly echoed Soviet preoccupations in foreign policy because she hereself had long been a much coveted and devastated country. It was a desire to escape Turkish ravages that in 1788 prompted Georgia to accept Russian sovereignty. From *Elisso* (N.Shengelaia, 1928) to *Georgian Chronicles of the*

Nineteenth Century (A.Rekhviashvili, 1979), the outsider, whether Turk, Cossack or capitalist, is typically seen as a threat to the local peasantry. On the other hand, the nobility is much less frequently denounced than in Slavic lands (*Salt for Svanetia,* by M.Kalatozov, 1930). Georgia had never known serfdom, and its world of small landowners and vinegrowers of the plain received its most famous depiction in R.Sheidze's *Father of the Soldier* (1964).

To describe the love of the peasant for his land, these films generally use poetry of a baroque sort (*The Prayer,* 1967, and *The Tree of Desire,* 1976, by T.Abuladze), either restrained (*Salt for Svanetia* and *Georgian Chronicles of the Nineteenth Century*) or humoristicin vein (*Pastorale*,by O.Ioseliani, 1973, and *Pirosmani,* by G.Shengelaia, 1969). One finds in the plot neither realistic intrigue nor brutality; one seeks in vain for any mention of the Menshevik regime that governed Georgia until 1921. On the contrary, the first comic film about the Revolution was produced by a Georgian, I.Perestiani, *The Little Red Devils* (1923), which tells the tale of three adolescents during the Civil War.

It would seem that this indifference to events is a fundamental aspect of national feeling, which is inclined to denounce or direct history only in relation to the land, land of plenty and land of welcome. Indeed, alongside the cycles of nature, Georgian multinationality has been a source of inspiration for scriptwriters.[7] The whole world is welcomed with open arms. Is not an airplane pilot the hero of Mimino (1977), the very popular film of G. Danelia? While on leave he tries to reach Telavi, his home town, and by mistake telephones the home of a Georgian Jew in Tel Aviv —and Perestiani was the first to include an American black among his "Little Devils".

The cinematic approach to Armenian history is both more precise and painful. It seems that the past has been systematically revaluated with regard to the 1916 genocide perpetrated by the Turks. This massacre is not, properly speaking, a national topic in terms of frequency (*Naapet* evokes the shock of 1916 only in 1977 in the work of the most famous Armenian producer of comic films, H.Mal'ian), but history is here implictly written in terms of trauma. In these films, the nineteenth century is prosperous and happy while the twentieth seems terribly devastated.

The cultural claims of Armenia spring from a conservationist sensibility: the past is dead, therefore one must piously preserve everything that belongs to it. S.Paradjanov, an Armenian living in

Georgia and covering in his work the entire Caucasus, has presented his country with the most beautiful of gifts: The cinematic poem on the life of *Sayat-Nova* (1969), a museum-piece in which all the elements of the décor are artistic masterpieces from the great Armenian museums. The twentieth century has sacrificed Armenia on the altar of international strategy: the sole publicly viewed film of A.Adzhrapetian and C.Abram'ian is devoted to the fratricidal conflict between *The Brothers Saroyan* (1968) at the time of the anti-Bolshevik regime which held power in Armenia from 1918 to 1921. The symbolic death of the two brothers puts an end to the story of a defeat. All that remains to Armenia is the memory of its young generations dispersed by labor of war (*The Triangle,* by G.Malian, 1967).

The Kirghiz historical tradition is based essentially on a mythical corpus *(The Epic of Manas)* orally transmitted for the last several centuries, since Kirghiz writing dates from after the Revolution. Of Turkish origin, the Kirghiz population consisted almost entirely of nomads who settled down for the most part after Kirghizia became a Soviet republic. Two events enabled the national film industry to expand: the creation of Kirghiz studios in 1942 after the evacuation of men from the western parts of the Soviet Union; and the arrival in the 1960s of producers trained in Moscow, men who went on to produce the first full-length films in the republic. It was in Kirghizia that Konchalovsky produced his *First Teacher* in 1965, the story of the everyday life of a communist schoolteacher in the 1920s.

All the films stress throughout the misery of the peasants in the nineteenth century and the brutal despotism of the local nobles, the bais. Terms of analysis close to those of Russian cinema are used to denounce economic and social backwardness. In *Storm over Asia,* V.Pudovkin evokes the misery of the Central Asian population in 1928, subject to severe climate and the uncertain revenue provided by hunting and husbandry. However, the crises of modern history and the rapid transformations of Kirghiz society have progressively altered the cinematic vision of Soviet progress. Indeed, producers tend to stress the importance of children and elderly people, who in the collective imagination represent virtues of innocence and wisdom. When A.Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky produced his first masterpiece in Kirghizia, children were depicted as the hope of the future, with a schoolmaster sending a young girl to the city to complete her education. Today all children study in

town, but are confronted with the broken lives of their parents who are ill-adapted to urban civilization while at the same time they reject traditional culture. There again the national outlook, from T.Okeev's *Sky of Our Childhood* (1967) to B. Shamsheev's *The White Boat* (1976), links up with the bitter Rusian view of the adult world. However, the rapid transition from an agricultural and pastoral world to an industrialized world is a source of hope for Kirghiz film producers who try to reassemble the fragments of a crumbling cultural and family tradition which is nevertheless still in existence. There is still hope of achieving a synthesis between the modern world (perceived as more industrialized than Soviet) and traditional wisdom.

TRADITION—AN ALTERNATIVE TO OFFICIAL HISTORY?

The values offered in the Kirghiz cinema are oriented simultaneously toward family and nature. This cultural reactivation distinguishes between good and bad uses of tradition. This ambiguous labor of purification is well illustrated by the films *Djamila* (I.Poplavskaia, 1970) and *The White Boat,* both from original scripts by Chingiz Aitmatov but produced respectively by Mosfilm and Kirghizfilm. Married without love to an adolescent gone to war, Djamila decides, against the advice of her mother-in- law, to take part in collective farming in the fields. She falls in love with a wounded soldier who is unable to return to the front, and runs away with him when her husband comes back. Here tradition is perceived as oppressive. *The White Boat* is more moderate, in the sense that the producer denounces a tradition cut off from its ethnic roots while proposing a cosmic and natural vision of society as expressed by the grandfather.

Georgia and Armenia, though more slowly, have also gone from denunciation to moderate recognition of collective integration rites. Both *Salt for Svanetia* and the first Armenian film, *Namus* (A.Bek-Nazarov, 1926), denounce the despotic rites and customs of Caucasian families. When a marriage or burial takes place, all that counts is the unchanging hypocrisy of the ritual. This unquestioning traditionalism perpetuates itself by means of exclusion or sacrifice: the murder of the young woman in *Namus,* and banishment in *The Prayer* (T.Abuladze), where a Christian

and a Muslim are simultaneously banished for having shown tolerance in their respective mountain villages.

The tone of denunciation could be felt throughout the Soviet Union in the 1930s. A moderate echo of this theme from 1965 to 1970 was not the symptom of regression. Two baroque poetical essays, *The Prayer* and S.Paradzhanov's *The Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors,* throw light on archaic magic and religious practices that can be dangerous for the community even if the director's opinion is by now more moderate. Multinationality and various religious synchretisms today preserve the Caucasian republics from the danger of fundamentalism.

On the other hand, cinematic illustration of modern life is based on cultural premisses of a more radical type. Georgian films devote a greater number of sequences to descriptions of traditional or private celebrations than to work. Armenian films, somewhat hampered by a lesser number of productions, seem less affected by this tendency. The Armenian considers work as a means to forget everyday worries (*Father,* by G.Malian, 1972) or to escape bloody memories (*Naapet,* where the gardener plants an apple tree in front of every house where a child is born).

The primary element of social integration in the Soviet Union, work, is not a Georgian value. This does not mean that the republic is famous for generalized lack of productivity. On the contrary, E. Shengelaia's *The Blue Mountains* (1984) denounces the bureaucratic inefficiency of the Soviets by employing the absurd. Nevertheless, for a Georgian the value of an individual lies as much in his generosity and festive spirit as in his professional qualities. Work is a necessary evil, description of which is of no interest, as opposed to other activities in social life such as farce, song, debate and drinking. All of these films offer the same model for approval, even if O.Ioseliani has become the specialist in *The Falling Leaves* (1966) and in the famous *Once upon a Time there Was a Singing Blackbird* produced in 1970. The blackbird, a young musician, works only twice a day, when he twice strikes the drums in the orchestra where is is employed as the drummer. Otherwise, he is a charming young man, always ready to help, and perfectly well integrated into Tbilisi society.

Georgian carefreeness with regard to work establishes a system of values in which the individual is more important than what he makes, and where freedom of spirit is a prerequisite for quality of life. This is the only way that work can become one of the

components of harmonious living, on a par with festivals, banquets and love. Ironic or comical aspects in these films question the seriousness of honors (*Pirosmani,* by G.Shengelaia, 1969; and *The Extraordinary Exhibition,* by E.Shengelaia, 1968) [8] or careers (*The Blue Mountains,* by E.Shengelaia, 1984). They are thus indirectly critical of two fundamental Soviet ideas: the productivity of the human being and the value and progress of technology.

The hero of *The Extraordinary Exhibition* is a sculptor who dreams of creating a masterpiece from the block of marble left to him by his master. In the mean time, in order to feed a more and more numerous family, he sculpts funeral images. He finally learns that the bureaucracy has erased him from the list of official artists because he never exhibits his work—all of it is in the cemetery. Here, all production seems condemned to nonexistence if the public is unaware of it. Following a similar line of thought, the cinema is willing to illustrate technical achievements in urban environments but will not attribute any progressive virtues to such achievements: when the passerby marvels at the monuments of Tbilisi he must always beware of the brick that a chimney mason may let drop on him *(Once upon a Time There Was a Singing Blackbird)*.

The typical Georgian confidence in the individual leads Georgians to grant special importance to unofficial information obtained through individual memory. This spirit is akin to what one finds in literature and film production of Mediterranean countries. In Algeria, Italy and Georgia, the woman is often entrusted with a family memory which is just as precious as the official memory of collective events. The movie-maker Lana Gogoberidze illustrates this feminine memory in two films, *Some Interviews on Personal Matters* (1978) and *Day Is Longer than Night* (1984). The quality of their social life seems to give the Georgians a "moral right" to criticize their heavy-handed Russian neighbors and the cumbersome Soviet bureaucracy as well as the elegant lies and corruption of French life (Les *Favoris de la lune,* by O.Ioseliani, 1984).

The choice of film productions as disparate as the Russian, Georgian, Armenian or Kirghiz makes possible an approach that can be fruitful as long as one bears in mind convergences. It would seem that social dispersion and the heritage of nomadic life allowed Kirghizia to adapt the Soviet model of development quickly; however, the cinema of this Asiatic republic has always

maintained respectful links with oral tradition, similar in kind to those expressed in Transcaucasian film production. Kirghizia, superficially affected by Islam, in contrast to her Turkmen or Tadzhik neighbors, is in a cultural situation similar to that of Armenia in her urgent attempt to assemble a heritage of film records, and to that of Georgia in her syncretic approach to religion.

These three non-Russian cinemas seek to master a modern time that is escaping them, while Russian cinema surrenders to it. History is a consumer article that can be mocked (Georgia), slowed down (Armenia) or resisted (Kirghizia). Russian film production either submits to history, or escapes from it through the disillusioned Utopia of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

Translated from the French by Mark Rolland.

1 On this topic, see the essay of C.Urjewicz, "L'héritage ambigu de la révolution russe", in Sylvie Dallet (ed.), *Guerres révolutionnaires (Histoire et cinéma)* (Paris: L'Harmattan Publications de la Sorbonne, 1984).

2 See the essay by F.Navailh, "La second guerre mondiale dans le cinéma sovietique: résistance révolutionnaire ou guerre patriotique?", in ibid.

3 On this subject, see the recent analyses of B.Kerblay and M.Lavigne in Les *Soviétiques des années 80* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1986), especially their statistics on Soviet tastes and values, p. 196.

4 In 1983, Bogomolov headed the commission which examined film scripts. The article in question, "Problemy gruzinskogo kino", appeared in *Iskusstvo kino,* no. 11 (1979). Cited in 'Il cinema delle repubbliche transcaucasiche sovietiche", *Nuevo Cinema,* 1986.

5 See the conclusion in Dallet, *Guerres révolutionnaires*.

6 See the essay "Culture et politique dans les cinématographies arménienne, géorgienne et Kirghize", in *Communisme* (CNRS/ L'Age d'homme), no. 9 (1986),

7 Georgia represents "the South" that attracts many Soviet visitors. In the past, the mountains of Georgia have served as a place of refuge for very diverse population-groups whose influence persists to this day.

8 El'dar Shengelaia, born in 1933, must be distinguished from Georgii Shengelaia, born in 1937.

CHAPTER 18
Does a Film Writing of History Exist? The Case of the Soviet Union

MARC FERRO

The problem is whether or not cinema and television modify our vision of history, given that history concerns not only knowledge of past phenomena, but also the analysis of links between past and present, the search for continuities and ruptures.

There is no doubt that in the last decade this problem has assumed a new importance: the time spent watching television keeps growing in Western societies, where television has become a kind of "parallel school". Moreover, for people who were colonized—especially those who lack a written historical tradition—historical knowledge depends to an even greater extent on the media, even if they have a strong oral tradition. It is clear that the stakes are very high.

In the Soviet Union, this problem is not exactly the same, because written texts—especially political ones—enjoy a privileged status in the social conscience. There was never a conflict between the cultures of cinema and of literature, for instance, as was the case in the United States. As for television, its cultural status has been lower in the Soviet Union than anywhere else at least until the 1980s. Nevertheless, this problem is a general one, and in this paper the Soviet Union is not the center of our considerations and analyses, but rather serves as a specific "case" in a global model.

This is not an entirely new problem. In the sense that it is information and knowledge, historical science has already been confronted with problems of the same type: novels and plays have triumphed over historical knowledge—at least, in our diffuse memories. When we think of Richelieu or Mazarin, are not the first memories that come to mind drawn from Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*? The same holds true of England where, as Peter Saccio has shown, everything Shakespeare says about Joan of Arc is invented and yet, despite the work of

historians, it is precisely Shakespeare's Joan of Arc that the English remember. The more time passes, the less are historians capable of changing that.

Unlike a work of history, which necessarily changes with distance and analytical developments, a work of art becomes permanent, unchanging. If these works of art are numerous, the problem remains. The case of Napoleon in Russia is a good example. In this country, where the figure of Napoleon has exerted a greater fascination than elsewhere, it is hard to say which image of the French emperor has attained dominance among the many portrayals. Is Napoleon an Antichrist, a barbarian, a tyrant, a Promethean, a martyr, a genius, or a mysterious phantom? Is he Pushkin's epic hero, Dostoevsky's or Tolstoy's philosophical given, the Marxists' proof? Whichever image predominates, it is certainly not derived from the works of historians.

Cinema and television constitute a new mode of expression for history. How does this mode transform our understanding of history or contribute to it?

The case of *Battleship Potemkin* illustrates the problem. Are not the images of the Revolution of 1905 that dominate our memory derived from Eisenstein's work? But, like the snowball scene in Gance's *Napoleon,* most of the scenes in these films stem "only" from the director's imagination. The ideological impact of these masterpieces, the stakes represented by these films are such that we have long been afraid to analyze them: that would have been sacrilegious toward those who consider the cinema a new Revelation.

In fact there are several ways to look at a historical film. The most common of these, inherited from a tradition of scholarship, consists of checking whether the historical reconstruction is precise (are the soldiers of 1914 mistakenly wearing helmets that were introduced only after 1916?), of checking to see if the décor and the locations are faithful to reality and if the dialogue is authentic. For the most part, filmmakers pay attention to this scholarly precision; in order to guarantee it, they happily turn to counterfeit historians who get lost deep down in the list of credits. Obviously, there are more demanding filmmakers who go to the archives themselves and play at being historians. They try to restore an ancient feel to the dialogue, using the patois of Silesia (Fleishmann), the language of the Camisards (Allio), and so on. The fame of some directors (like Tavernier) is based on this demanding approach; still others,

such as Bertolucci in *The Spiders' Strategem,* know how to use a simple red scarf or an indefinable change in luminosity to represent the passage to a faroff or to an imaginary world.

The scholarly positivist approach does not exclude the use of other criteria. The realization of both *Alexander Nevsky* and *Andrei Rublev* meets these "scholarly" demands: none the less, they re-create the same (or almost the same) moments of history by making two films with opposite meanings. In *Nevksy,* the mortal enemy is the Germans, or Teutons, while in *Rublev* it's the Chinese, the Tartars. In *Rublev,* Russia is saved by her sanctity, her Christianity; in *Nevsky,* the hero is deliberately secularized. Taking this for granted, we quickly separate the film's ideology from the filmmaker's talent.

Often, the ideological view supplants the positivist one: the film is appreciated for its meaning as well as for its essence. In a society dominated by ideology, it is easy to perceive why this way of seeing gained the upper hand. It is obvious that Abel and Jean Renoir offer two contrary visions of the French Revolution: the former's vision is Bonapartist and prefascist, glorifying the man of destiny, while the latter's is Marxian and ignores the very existence of great men. And in both cases, without having to justify or legitimize his choice, the filmmaker chooses those historical facts and elements that provide fodder for his demonstration, omitting those that do not. This makes him happy and pleases those who share his faith and who constitute "his public". If the cause he defends has broad support, it will benefit the filmmaker's prestige as well as his finances. But it may not necessarily benefit historical analysis, in the sense of contributing to the intelligibility of the phenomena.

From this point of view, Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* represents a very problematical "case". Unravelling the motives for an offensive at any price (with all the rottenness that this involves from the top to the bottom of the military hierarchy), his choice of situations—all authentic—is such that it pleases antimilitarists, democrats and those on the left. None the less, it heaps up so many abuses that it undermines the credibility of the overall picture and renders incomprehensible the birth and durability of veterans groups where, for many years after 1918, soldiers and officers continued to fraternize.

All this reveals that the historical film, or more often the film about history, is no more than the transcription of a vision of history that has been conceived by others.

It is true that by an innovative choice of a particular story some filmmakers can help render intelligible certain historical phenomena, and that they can do so in a creative fashion. In *The Damned,* for example, Visconti opens a royal way for those who want to understand how Nazism penetrated into the German upper bourgeoisie. Moreover, in this case the form and theme chosen render opaque the film's latent ideology—the ideology of Visconti, who sees the meaning of history in a kind of decadence. As Ishaghpour has shown, each of his works constitutes an elegy for everything that disappears for ever under the force of the new.

The case is different for all films that use incidental events *(faits divers)* to portray social and political forces. In this approach, Renoir, Rossellini, Shukshin and Chabrol have followed in the path of novelists such as Zola or Sartre; however, these filmmakers have applied this procedure to the past (and not only to the present), and they have outpaced historians.

Hence, since any theme can be manipulated, the principal distinction is not really between film where history provides the setting (such as *La Grande Illusion* or Gone *with the Wind*) and those whose subject is history (*Danton,* for example). The distinction is rather between films that move with the flow of dominant—or oppositional—currents of thought and those that propose, on the contrary, an independent or innovative view of society.

Thus the function of analysis, or counteranalysis, in cinema can really take place only under two conditions. First, the filmmakers must have separated themselves from ideological forces and ruling directives—and this is not the case of directors of propaganda films. If this is not the case, their work only furthers, in a new form, dominant (or oppositional) ideological currents. The second condition is that the writing be cinematic—and not, for example, filmed theater—and that it use specific cinematic means.

The contribution of cinema to the intelligibility of historical phenomena varies according to the degree of its autonomy and its aesthetic contribution.

Whether dealing with the history of great men (Nevsky, Napoleon and General Custer) or privileging the action of groups (Pudovkin's *Mother* and Renoir's *La Marseillaise*), these films

reproduce dominant (or oppositional) currents of thought. The pleasure they evoke through their beauty is the only way they can act upon society, upon history—even if that is not what was desired. For example, in making *La Grande Illusion,* Renoir wanted to act upon history, not to act for peace. Films in this category go a bit further when the artist does not merely reconstitute a phenomenon but "reconstructs" it: this is the case of *Strike,* where Eisenstein achieves a cinematic transcription of a Marxist analysis of a pre-1905 Russian factory.

Films that involve collective struggle but are designed to fight the dominant system are set under the contrary sign, since they go against the current or reigning power. The contribution of films such as *Salt of the Earth,* of the majority of Polish historical films, or of *Rublev or Ceddo,* is superb: these films not only bear witness but are also involved in the struggle.

It seems appropriate to place to one side those films that proceed from an analysis independent of any "ideological" affiliation and which, at the same time, use specifically filmic means of expression. A typical example of this category seems to be Fritz Lang's *M*. By tracing the story of a pscychotic individual, the film shows how the Weimar Republic functioned; the use of parallel montage, the alternation of sound and image give the narration a form that is possible only in cinema. Its idea, like its analytical procedures, is both innovative and independent.

M constitutes one example. But there are many other films which contribute to an understanding of societies: one could mention the works of Kazan, Renoir or the New Wave of filmmakers that use incidental events, social analyses of the present, but of a present rooted in the heritage of the past.

In addition to documentary films, which preserve the image of the present together with what remains of the past or which fall back on the memory of societies (such as Jean Rouch's *Babatou et les trois conseils*), one can also place to one side those filmmakers who offer a global interpretation of history—an interpretation that springs solely from their own analysis and which is not merely a reconstruction or a reconstitution, but an original contribution to the understanding of past phenomena in their relation to the present. However one feels about the validity of their analyses, the works of Syberberg, Tarkovsky and Visconti belong to this category.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE: PROPOSAL FOR A GLOBAL CLASSIFICATION OF FILMS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HISTORY

It appears that statements about society have four possible sources:

(1) Dominant institutions and ideologies, which may express the point of view of the State, a church, a party, or any organization having its own vision of the world.
(2) Those opposed to this vision, who elaborate a counterhistory or a counteranalyais, in so far as they have the means and the ability to do so.
(3) Social or historical memory, which survives through oral tradition, or through legitimized works of art.
(4) Independent interpretations—scientific or not—which proceed with their own analysis.

A second mode of classifying films and other cultural works concerns their mode of approach to social and historical problems.

(1) From above. That is, from the viewpoint of power and its demands.
(2) From below. That is, from the viewpoint of the masses—peasants, workers, fishermen, etc.
(3) From within. The narrator places himself into his analysis, keeping pace with the object of his study. For example, this occurs when the filmmaker clarifies his procedure by means of a voice-off, or chats with his camera (Dziga Vertov in *Man with a Camera*).
(4) From without. The filmmaker constructs models, i.e. formally reconstructs a social or political object without trying to reconstitute it.

These four modes and approaches allow us to propose a general tableau of classification. None the less, it must first be remarked that a work, whether cinematic or not, can involve *several* of these modes/approaches. It is up to the analysis to identify its characteristics; this proposal for classification plays only an instrumental rôle. For example, Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* is at once a film which questions the official vision of history and which

approaches society from below, analysing the behavior of Mexican miners and their wives. It is a work that calls upon witnesses and their memories. But it is also a work which reconstructs the exemplary model of a strike where the workers struggle against big companies—the Indians and their Yankee patrons—and where the fight is instigated by their wives.

CHAPTER 19
The Anthill in the Year of the Dragon
MICHAEL BRASHINSKY

> The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
>
> EZRA POUND

Perestroika took us by surprise and backed us into a corner. There is no escaping it. Those who made faces just looking at *Pravda's* front page soon realized that it was time to change their ways. Suddenly people began to use the new jargon of *glasnost*. At the same time, they missed the pleasure of suffering from the unbearable lightness of social being.

But did it take a little too long to part with the old illusions in order to choke on the new ones? The euphoria that runs through Russian veins veils reality. It engenders notorious "likemindedness" and prevents one from taking a sober look at the past, the future or the present.

The term *perestroika* faces the same misfortune of all too successful symbols—a loss of meaning. Although *perestroika* is a noun, it derives from a verb: "to reconstruct, to restructure". So it must be viewed as a process and not as a result, as the license to protest or obtaining a visa to travel abroad may seem. It is just a transition, neither more nor less. And this is true about everything, including film, which according to our party instructions is "of all of the arts the most important" for this country. But, as far as cinema is concerned, there is a lot of argument about the film industry, while the artistry is kept in the closet. It would help to let it out.

Perhaps most intellectuals just don't dare admit that perestroika is nothing but a transition, for they don't want to believe that it could come to an end. For, if it does come to an end, what's next? It is terrifying to surmise, but even more terrifying to think

that they may not have enough time to say what they want to say. So let it be as it is: better one-eyed than stone-blind.

Almost all films of the transitional period, if not one-eyed, are one-legged, and this is nevertheless better than to be kneeling. Such a position is not their fault, for the starting-point of the transition is obvious: oppression, indifference, guilty conscience. But I would not say so about the end of the road. Where are we heading? Even if toward freedom, what is freedom? Is freedom just the right to say what you think and act according to your words? The spectrum of freedom is broad and infinitely colorful, but we still prefer black and white.

In addition, the greatest sin committed by the Party against this culture during the eras of Stalin and Brezhnev is having isolated Soviet intellectual life from the universal cultural stream. Cutting off the branch of the tree and putting it into a flowerpot, they said: "You're the wood, the real wood and the only wood." Now the replantation has begun, but it's hard to be a 70-year-old baby. And it's painful to follow the path of a perennial in the course of a five-year plan. Today we possess our native "surrealism", "absurdism", "underground" and "off-off-Broadway", and, bless us, if it is not too late. The problem is that during these parallel decades we, unlike the West, could not taste the whole variety of freedoms. So now we have to move at random. Now at least this is allowed. Let us consider specific examples.

THE FIRST WAY

Assa—the hit of 1988—is stuck between the post-modern manner and the social subject-matter, resembling a skidding car from which dynamic rock music is heard, creating the illusion of a swift drive. To make an electric-integral show of the "stagnational" decline, the director, Sergei Solovev, did not have the nerve to *dump old Russian psychology and narrative*. Nor did he trust post-modernism which, in this case, demanded a whimsical mix of traditional clichés, mass genres and improbable hints. *Assa* will become the classic of the midst and a rather amusing illustration of what happens when language ceases to be speech, i.e. content.

The Photo with a Woman and a Wild Boar, as a kind of Soviet version of *Fatal Attraction*—and quite an attractive one—is a first attempt to put down roots in the field of sensuality, though not in the sense of feelings and emotions: there was plenty of that

released by the home film industry in passionate scandals among workers and bosses in the so-called "industrial movies". I mean sensulaity as a particular secret reality, which had barely existed before (partly since it is alien to Russian tradition) and with which the West was already fed up from early Buñuel up to Adrianne Lyne. In this case the creators lacked the eroticism and irrationality, the only means by which one could penetrate beneath the story, beneath substance, beneath consciousness.

The Cold Summer of' 53 is the most successful and the most openly transitional work of the transitional period. The director, Alexander Proshkin, decided to tell, by means of the American Western, about that unstable and gloomy time (also transitional in some sense) after Stalin's death. But he stopped halfway; the result is one more film-centaur.

Here is its muscular body: The amnesty connected with the Great Leader's death not only released political prisoners but also some ordinary thugs who attack a God-forsaken northern village. Since there are no "real men" there to resist except for one prisoner, a so-called "enemy of the people" in exile (who looks more like Henry Fonda in *My Darling Clementine* than a Soviet captain), nothing else is left for him to do but to finish off all the gang and leave us for a misty future.

The film has some penetrating scenes where the bullet, flying along the trajectory of the Western, hits the mark, but again the director lacked something: this time the finesse gets the better of the genre, without abandoning the historical truth. The next step has to be toward understanding that gangsters can operate not only with guns, but with party cards as well.

THE CROSSROAD

Back to freedom now, for there is the rub.

The first embarrassed reaction to the announcing of freedom was silence. It turned out that to be free in a cage is far easier and cosier. You must know how to use everything—both the camera and the freedom. And, before one can decide where to walk when one is allowed to walk everywhere, one must first contemplate this question: "Is it possible for freedom to be allowed?"

Today we live in a country where the word "freedom" has no abstract meaning. Although freedom needs no classifications, what

we need now is a classification of freedoms. And a man is known by the freedom he keeps.

The first path on to which many films started (*TheNeedle, Mr Designer, Weld, Zero City,* in addition to those already mentioned) leads toward new artistic modes. This path is based on a more or less conscious conviction that the right to speak is not quite enough for the art. Another path moves toward freedom of speech, and this idea is no less important than that of ideology if ideology is, as such, important. This second path is needed and dangerous at the same time. It is needed because when someone has regained his voice he must verbalize that which has been building up inside him. He used Aesopian language for too long and, while being forced to speak, leaned over backwards to keep his dignity. For too long he has trained his subconscious to be conscious. Now he must kill the censor in himself.

This path is dangerous because *glasnost* gave birth to it, demanding words and no art. When you have so much to say, it doesn't matter how you say it. This path is also dangerous because it has no pointers and landmarks, though it deals with some strange kinds of freedom, for instance, liberty of conscience and of dishonesty. But doesn't banning the latter create a new sort of cage?

GLASNOST ITALIAN-STYLE

Today there are almost no conscious escapists in this country. On the contrary, everybody tends to promulgate his political activity because today it is not as shameful as it was before. Furthermore, there is no more room for escapism. The past, which was once a favorite theme in the movies because of its stylishness and lack of ideology, is now closed to escapism, since the past has become one of the vital questions of the present. (One can grin: "Russia is a country of the unpredictable past.") Is there anywhere to escape, except a foreign land, if you are not a junkie?

Nikita Mikhalkov *(Dark Eyes)* was at his best here again; moving to the West after a stormy romance with contemporary Russian reality in his last Soviet films *Kinfolk* and *Without Witnesses,* Mikhalkov produced his spicy, though rather tasteless, cocktail of Western and Eastern sensibilities. Being ignorant of which star is more striking—the aged Mastroianni or the young *Glasnost*—Mikhalkov let them co-star? a sappy love-story stands

side by side with white-toothed humored pictures of good old "mother Russia", immense, impenetrable, and inconceivably backward in its bureaucratic hypocrisy. But what Mr Mikhalkov presents to us as the essence of the "Russian spirit" is a total bluff (*kliukva*: "cranberry"). Well, one can envy Mikhalkov: not many of us, who, thanks to *perestroika,* also live in a kind of "foreign land" now, can muster up the strength in ourselves to see the shameful past like a foreigner, smiling behind his mustache. It looks like a new brand of escapism, and you don't even have to leave the country.

The lightness with which our directors began to crush the "stagnational" past is amazing—not the lightness of criticism but the ease with which they are reborn from ruins themselves, as if it is not their past. *Perestroika* as it is: As one recent comedy put it: "My intestine restructured itself immediately."

CRITICISM IN LAW

The southern Russian godfather is more sophisticated than Mr Brando, and no less powerful; living the high life of the low-level "red" Mafia; sex under the broiling sun of Soviet Georgia; the burning-hot iron on the belly as the weapon of the racket; the sswing off of arms to the music of Bizet's *Carmen*. Kitsch is all the rage in this first native thriller since *glasnost*.

Kings of Crime is as smooth as a ping-pong ball and rebounds off everything as well. At first it seems like a harmless joke on subjects that were considered taboo not long ago: prostitution, the Mafia, corruption in the KGB. Now, at long last, the cinema has tackled these subjects, and certainly they must be unshelved, but unfortunately some directors have decided that a scandalous topic is quite enough to call what they are producing "art" and to label themselves "*perestroika* supporters".

In fear of being misunderstood, the director, Yuri Kara, however, soon reveals his true intentions with less than subtle hints that the film is actually about the "stagnational" past and not about our sunny present: the walls of the film are hung with Brezhnev's portraits and not with Gorbachev's, and one can certainly commend the director's uncanny ability to please the public and the Party as well; not only was *Kings of Crime* a box-office crash, but it also joins the canon of *"pseudo-perestroika"* films. But who needs this? Is it really *glasnost*?

TO KILL THE DRAGON IN THE YEAR OF THE DRAGON

Today courage is hardly a rare commodity. Whereas once the main drama in Soviet art was the conflict between the "good" and "even better", now we can compare the "daring" with "even more daring". What could be more daring, for instance, than a call for us to "kill the dragon within ourselves"? The dragon, in this case, is the totalitarian regime that turned us into slaves, but we are seemingly worthy of this fate. This is the main idea of the film *To Kill the Dragon,* and not a bad one, either.

The film is directed by Mark Zakharov (the celebrated theater and television director) and is based on the play by Evgeny Shvartz, *The Dragon,* probably the most lyrical and bitter of all Soviet dramas. The play is a parable about the fight of love against tyranny, the nature of freedom and slavery, and reaffirms the romantic notion that if one is not born a slave one will not die a slave. Written in 1943, the play could have been interpreted as a threat to Stalinism; it was therefore labeled as only an anti-Hitler pamphlet but none the less quietly banned.

But the play's misfortunes did not stop there: now it has been basically rewritten for the screen and appears as a kind of *perestroika* handbook, looking much like an Orwellian political farce or a Soviet history course. The repulsive Dragon putting the place in order and wishing to be called the "Great Father" is Stalin and no one else, despite the lack of make-up. After the Dragon is destroyed in air combat with the knight errant (which is an unfortunate anachronism), the power passes to another tyrant—the "sweetheart" President—who presents himself a hero, befriends the "people" and drinks with the hangman. He simultaneously embodies the qualities of two other Soviet leaders: the sly simplicity and sham liberalism of Khrushchev and the stagnant ideology and passion for decoration of Brezhnev. All this is performed in the vein of a Steven Spielberg production, and at times it is truly funny. The film closes with the pathetic scene of the defeated knight who, disillusioned with the people, meets the Dragon reincarnated in the body of an ordinary man. Now the Dragon rules a band of kids who symbolize our future, and they are the ones, therefore, who are worth saving, according to the director. While the foes are preparing for the last fight, the director

doesn't allow the children to shut their eyes to the impending massacre, for after all this is *glasnost*.

The film can be read as a newspaper: everything is in the text and there is nothing between the lines. But ultimately it is a matter of taste where to read. To my eyes, the point is different: the director's rather child-like firm belief that the end justifies the means. And the means are simple to the point of absurdity and are tested on the living corpse of "stagnation".

One must be a vegetarian to be ignorant of the fact that our sausage contains no meat, but when it is proclaimed on stage or on screen as a revelation the audience bursts into applause and some of them rise up out of their seats in profound respect for the artists' "civic courage". This is the psychology of a nation which has been brought up on "doublethink" and the Aesopian language of political jokes.

Mark Zakharov's methods are all the same. The film is ruled by Grand Allusion: in its words ("The winter will be long," says one of the characters, pulling on a Russian fur cap, moaning that resistance to *perestroika* will be strong); in its deeds (the President, like Brezhnev, has trouble reading his speeches from crib notes); and even in its appearances (the actor who plays the President bears a striking resemblance to Khrushchev). The true courage here is not worth a penny (is it possible that genuine courage can wink cowardly at the public?), but none the less the film enjoys great success. And what about the price paid for it? The price is true art and the artistic truth, which is substituted by the socio-political allusions to the half-truth, just token truth. Although I'm *probably* no bolder than Mark Zakharov, I did think to myself, if not utter after the showing of the film: "*Fellow citizens,* you're still being manipulated!"

THE NEW FACE OF THE "OLDEST PROFESSION"

I know nothing about biology, but in art criticism there are no methods for analyzing mimicry; though in art, as well as in biology, mimicry is alright. Nevertheless, it would be strange if a biologist would call for the obliteration of mimicking organisms. So would it not be strange for me to call for interdiction, persecution and ostracism? Yet, overcoming shame and

powerlessness, I'm forced to resort to the regrettably familiar slogan: "Be vigilant!"

The fact that our society legalized prostitution only recently does not abolish the attribute of prostitution: "the oldest profession". This is also true in art: dodgers and toadies always were and always will be, and it would not be worth using up paper if it were not for the new set of circumstances in which we all find ourselves.

Formerly conjuncture consisted of the sham foundation of false value, the insincere glorification of fictional reality, the shameless proclaiming of nonexistent freedom, and it did not take much to discern it: it was quite enough to walk out on the street or to listen to the Voice of America in Russian.

Nowadays the polarization of appearance and essence is not so urgent. So the time-servers switched over to the essences—to the true value and the true pain. Here is the rub: How can we discern them now?

The more important the subject-matter (and what can be more important than fate?), the harder it is to decide the criterion for sincerity and truth. Who wants to say that the fortuneteller is lying if she promises success, even if one suspects her of "underhandedness"?

The art critic in Russia is now in a critical position; raising his hand against those mealy-mouthed persons who know at all times where to go and with whom, he risks falling automatically into the rank of "prohibitors" and "retrogrades": "Well, he's against the exposure of our diseases, against the representation of sex, etc., and therefore he's against *glasnost,* 'new thinking'. Sick him!"

But does not our long-suffering and sinful past cry out the fact that creating sociopolitical myths devalues rather than immortalizes its subject-matter? The "personality cults" of our century just confirm this general rule. Creating the myth of "communism" put communism into a deep coma. *Perestroika* is faced with the same fate.

And those who produce the "*perestroika* myth", the deadly muth, are not necessarily the so-called "enemies of *perestroika*"—Stalinists, conservatives, etc.—because the conjuncture has changed, but its heart and base still remain the same: the servility to the ruling opinion and nonfreedom. This is the ailment from which our society still cannot recover and which all of us—"the children of the Transition"—are leaving and still cannot leave.

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CHAPTER 20
With Perestroika, *without Tarkovsky*

PETER SHEPOTINNIK

It is clearly impossible to list the entire range of sensations that a Soviet cinema critic faces when asked to give a brief account of the state of Soviet cinematography today. And still, to put it in a nutshell, the situation is now approximately the same as it was at the crest of the 1920s. At that time the unexpectedly emerging sound film had swept the efforts of many silent filmmakers—who had commanded the medium just a few years before—into history.

The impression is that "sound" has suddenly been turned on in our time, too. Everything has acquired a voice—our history with a mass of blank spots, some of which it would be more accurate to call red spots, our economy of long queues and dying villages, and our unstable practical position in the world—everything started suddenly becoming visible as in Antonioni's *Blow-Up,* and it should be said that the resulting picture looks forbidding and aweinspiring, so much so that one feels like looking aside. But nevertheless there is a need to look and see. This need is felt by filmmakers more than by anyone else. First of all this need inspired documentary filmmakers, who became intoxicated with the plentiful new opportunities after 1985 and plunged into the battle of *perestroika* with unbelievable ardor. This ardor can be explained not only by the principle of immediate response inherent in documentary cinematography but also by the fact that our life has grown full of social problems those in the West cannot even imagine.

The Soviet tradition of documentary cinematography, in contradistinction to the Western one, is inseparably linked with sermonizing and denouncing. Thus, in contrast, now is the time for collecting facts. The documentary filmmakers are what the Soviet people needed.

A list of documentaries is not unlike the agenda of the first Congress of People's Deputies, which has just concluded (July 1989) but which kept the whole country spellbound while it lasted, making millions of Soviet people spend hours in front of their television sets watching and listening to such things, broadcast live, as furious invectives hurled by radical deputies at such formerly untouchable institutions of power as the armed forces, the KGB, and even the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party.

Incidentally, digressing slightly, I must say that it might make a film of world importance, if somebody could only film, compressing it within two or three hours, the Congress, replete with many dramas and striking reactions of which Stanislavsky could only dream, and scenes which no Meyerhold could have invented. It had everything—directors of genius, ham actors, sly fools and ready prompters. And one could see quite clearly who had managed to become vocal and who remained deaf to the anguish of the nearly exhausted country.

I feel that having started to speak about filmmaking I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon politics and social problems, though I'm trying to confine my notes to purely cinematographic topics. The fact is that life itself is now such that "films don't matter". Its realities disrupt all the institutionalized styles and genres.

The Congress rendered senseless the efforts of numerous documentary filmmakers who had worked to *create not films per se* but, rather, illustrations of journalistic pamphlets. If, in the not too distant past, documentary *filmmakers* vied to present sensations and catastrophes (Stalinism, ethnic strife, ecological disasters, dissidents, drug addiction, prostitution, etc.), and new heroes, who had been called anti-heroes not long ago (Lyubimov, Akhmatova, Galich and others), now newspaper-type documentary filmmaking has very few chances to survive under pressure from total television *glasnost*.

Besides, as is known, *"new model"* cinematography presupposes replacement of the system of state subsidies by a system of profit-and-loss accounting, in fact a kind of freedom inside out, the abolition of ideological censorship, which will naturally deal a heavy blow to non-prestigious kinds of film—popular science, animated cartoons, and documentaries.

I am not a specialist in economics and would not like to delve into this very touchy problem. However, the following is obvious: old methods of economic management have cracked down the middle and are slowly giving way under the onslaught of new requirements; and the new ones—profit and loss, cost-accounting and self-financing—are still very timidly applied, irregular and inconsistent. The present period is a period of transition, a very dangerous period as it harbours a possibility of a return to the power and pressure methods of the past, so it is too early to guess about the future.

One thing is clear: we do not have economists in our cinema who could act on a par with Gavril Popov and Nikolai Shmelev. Common sense, capable of inspiring hopes, is also lacking. In our filmmaking everything depends, as always, on pure intuition and chance. As there is no sociological basis for restructuring distribution, many feel driven to make money as best they can, eventually disrupting the aesthetic basis of filmmaking, which is not too firm as it is.

The commercial element has never been felt so strongly in our cinema, and so it is beginning to acquire truly ugly forms.

Vasily Pichul, who was the first who dared to depict a sexual act in film, which took nothing away from the merits of *Little Vera,* has inspired many irresponsible craftsmen to abuse mercilessly the bodily beauty of females, and also, of late, male actors. Sergei Snezhkin recently made a decisive step in this direction in his otherwise drab satire *A District-Wide Emergency,* a film spear-headed against bureaucracy inside the Young Communist League. One of the film's central attractions is a celebration, involving "ladies of ill-repute" in a sauna for the élite. The plot of the film boils down to the episode of purloining a banner from the district Komsomol Committee, as was first depicted in a story by Yuri Polyakov, where it was designed to produce a shock effect. As for the film, however, its critical *élan* expired on the way to the screen: the characters in the film proved too insignificant—a functionary given to reflections and a fawning entourage.

A *somewhat* morbid reorientation toward plots in which sensation is inherent—political, erotic or *criminal—inevitably* results in a crisis of purely cinematographic ideas and leads to a general impression of excessive voltage, not sufficiently clothed in good drama.

The ambiguity of the situation in "genre" filmmaking is also contributed to by the fact that our film studios, with their extremely modest technical equipment, can in no way compete with the American films penetrating the pirate video market. Soviet mass viewers, whose consciences have been infected by foreign film stimulants, tend to get overexcited in their demands for Soviet supplies of thrillers which Soviet conditions do not permit. All this results in a prevalence of Hollywood imitations which have no real opportunity to attain the quality of license commodities as demanded by the customer. The profound sorrow which this tendency causes me is accounted for by the fact that the Western market, very flexible in its commercial orientations, has long since found exquisite means of manipulating mass consciousness by incorporating commercial patterns in the refined style of "cultured" films. But, for a viewer who was trained to respond to straightforward references to the present situation, such films no longer seem attractive. A confirmation of this observation can be seen in the failure of Milos Forman's *Amadeus* to attract Soviet cinemagoers—a film which was a colossal success in the West, especially in Europe.

The most striking example of commercial reorientation of our cinema is Yuri Kara's film *Kings of Crime,* a story of the Mafia which corrupted the police in Soviet Georgia. This "cruel criminal romance", which presented to the public a new sex star, Anna Samokhina, was enthusiastically hailed by the public. Now the critics are awaiting, not without apprehension, the release of Kara's new film, *A Day in the Life of Joseph Stalin,* based on a recently published story by the remarkable writer Fazil Iskander. This apprehension is motivated by the possibility of turning the fine and sacred theme of the personality cult into a common thriller, of which the director appears capable.

Another film of this kind, which has been widely publicized by television and the press, is soon to hit the screen—a screen version of Vladimir Kunin's story *Intergirl* made at Lenfilm by Petr Todorovskii, a representative of the generation of the sixties. The sensational core of this film—prostitution for hard currency—is temporized with lyricism in a surprising, purely Russian way. The central character (Yelena Yakovleva), having concluded a profitable marriage with a Swedish businessman and thus having escaped from the confines of Leningrad's currency hotels, dies of nostalgia.

However, not all feature films which we describe as genre have been motivated by such a prevailing desire to make profits. A wonderful example of inventiveness can be seen in the satire *The Fountain* by Leningrad director Yuri Mamin; he turned Soviet reality into metaphor in a story about a dilapidated apartment building whose leaking roof can only be kept in place by slogans calling for the implementation of decisions adopted by the Leadership. Finally, *The Cold Summer of '53,* by Alexander Proshkin, is undoubtedly a masterpiece of Soviet filmmaking, and, having already scored considerable success at the 1989 film festival in Munich, is already regarded as a classic. This Western-type film, which skillfully manipulates the public's attention, portrays convicts victimized at the time of Stalinist repressions who dash with criminals terrorizing a small village in the Russian north.

Proshkin's film was noted not only for its commercial but also for its noble educational effect, as it revealed to the broad masses of Soviet filmgoers, and not only for the narrow layer of omniscient intelligentsia, some of the truth about Stalinism—the truth which, alas, needs to be pushed very strongly into the mass consciousness, as Stalinist ideology is still considered viable by many. Thus artists, endowed with common sense, still face a long-term struggle against advocates of orthodox socialism, Stalin-style. Many Soviet viewers still long for stability, deluding themselves by taking for stability the elimination of Gorbachev-style democracy which has been won at such great cost.

Judging by data cited in *Variety* (5–11 July 1989), *Little Vera* still tops the list of most popular films in the Soviet Union for 1988–9. Incidentally, the open Soviet press does not readily provide information about the circulation of Soviet films, so thanks are due to Deborah Young of *Variety*.

The phenomenal success of the film has surpassed all expectations: it won prizes in Chicago, Venice and, recently, in Geneva "for the most promising talent" of Natalya Negoda who, to cap it all, also made the cover of *Playboy* magazine. A new film by Vasily Pichul is to be released soon, based on a screenplay by his wife, Mariya Khmelik: *Nights Are Dark in the City of Sochi.* Such prestigious festivals as those of Venice and Cannes are eager to have this film shown there, a fact without precedent in Soviet cinematography.

Little Vera has thrown open the doors to the sexual theme in Soviet filmmaking. It has also introduced a kind of "black film" vogue, as contrasted to "gray films", for which the earlier leadership of Soviet cinema was so strongly denounced at the memorable 5th Congress of Filmmakers in 1986.

The Soviet screen has been inundated by films depicting consequences of the loss of social faith (Vera is also "faith"). There have been films about orphans, children brought up in laborcamps, persons without permanent residence, asocial elements and the like.

The most expressive illustration of the series is the bitter-sweet film by Sergei Bodrov (director and scriptwriter), *Freedom Is Paradise,* which was first shown internationally at the 1989 Montreal Festival. Its protagonist is a boy who believes in the miracle of family reunification. He flees from a penitentiary to look for his drunkard father who is in jail. No less "black" is also the film directed by former cameraman Alexander Itygilov, *Quiet Cemetery*.

This film deserves special note as it is the first screen version of a story written in the time of *perestroika,* the famous "Quiet Cemetery" by Sergei Kaledin printed in 1987 in the *Novy Mir* magazine. It met with no less enthusiasm than the publication in the same magazine a few months earlier of the newly rehabilitated *Doctor Zhivago*.

Quiet Cemetery is a gloomy naturalistic talk, very perturbing to the reader, which depicts the moral degradation of workers at a Soviet cemetery. The screen version may have lost something of the literary work's finesse, but it has certainly gained in the visual coarse-grained detail. The central character is played by Vladimir Gostyukhin, a famous Soviet actor first "discovered" by director Larisa Shepitko, who invited him to play the part of the traitor Rybak in her film *The Ascent*. In this film, he aspires to tragic heights, yet his character is hopelessness incarnate.

Another ruthless tale by Sergei Kaledin, "Building Battalion", is soon to appear. It is a story of cruelty in the Soviet armed forces. The manuscript had been shelved for a long time by military censorship and only this year, thanks to the efforts of Sergei Zalygin, *Novy Mir's* editor-in-chief, was it finally published. Thus another blank spot of modern life will most certainly be covered by Soviet filmmakers in due time.

It is worthwhile taking a look at a list of filmmakers who recently found themselves in the focus of critical attention. The tone is set by directors who entered the scene in the eighties, after the fifth congress. We may well call them a new generation of Gorbachevites, as the Western press tends to call them, regardless of how conventional this political term may sound when applied to the arts.

In contrast, those from the seventies—German, Klimov and Panfilov—seem reluctant to respond spontaneously to the new situation; they seem to be waiting, which bespeaks both a desire to comprehend the substance of our changes and a fear of the new texture of Soviet life. Anyway, it is not a bad position for a genuine artist, and it may yet prove more productive.

Of the generation who came on in the seventies, Vadim Abdrashitov with his permanent scriptwriter Alexander Mindadze have the most stamina. During the *perestroika* period they have already made such major pictures as *Plumbum or a Dangerous Game* and *The Servant*. It should be said that the Abdrashitov-Mindadze duo belong among those few who did not reconcile to stagnation and civil apathy in the seventies, having chosen as their central theme a test of human morality in the epoch of conformism. In their film *A Turn* (1979), a new car belonging to a couple of newlyweds, enjoying their honeymoon without a care in the world, knocks over an old woman. The accident, which is absolutely unambiguous from the legal point of view, blasts the atmosphere of well-being which reigned in the family, and makes the people fussy and sly. The local conflict engenders the authors' sarcasm with respect to the alleged stability of the two characters' moral stands. Each film made by Abdrashitov and Mindadze later —*Fox Hunting, A Train Has Stopped and Parade of Planets*— reveals an ever deepening crisis of social ideals. But no sooner had the possibility of a return to ideals become visible in the early days of *perestroika* than Abdrashitov and Mindadze surprised the viewer with their new social and psychological paradox— *Plumbum or a Dangerous Game*.

Its central character is a male adolescent whose desire to take revenge on the truly unfair and perverted world is so great that it becomes the sole focus of his behavior: he wishes to punish any transgressor with whatever means are available without thinking twice, and using means and forms of punishment without discernment. At a time of social debunking and denunciation, the

dictum "Judge not, that ye be not judged" seemed, at first sight, not quite timely, but the prophecy of Abdrashitov and Mindadze proved quite to the point: in the country where presumption of innocence is barely penetrating people's mentality, the name of Plumbum has almost become a catchword.

The Servant got a cool reception both at home and at a West Berlin film festival owing to structural imbalances and a certain coolness of tonality. But the film could be regarded as propounding another most important dictum: it is necessary to rid the mentality of Soviet man of submissiveness and subservience. A resigned submission to the Master easily identified by Soviet viewers with a functionary, debauches both the Master and the Servant and perverts society. This idea of Abdrashitov and Mindadze is brilliantly interpreted by actors Oleg Borisov and Yuri Belyayev and is elaborated at every level with striking psychological insight and inventiveness.

Soviet cinema keeps persistently looking for new idioms that can only originate in this country.

Soviet cinema is more irrational. The very existence of the Soviet arts depends on the fact that we can idle away year after year and then ingeniously hit the nail on the head. The average level of commercial striving looks more than naïve; and the billions of dollars spent on Hollywood films are for us an unattainable dream. However, with the unique Soviet filmmaking geniuses such as Tarkovsky, Ioseliani, Muratova and Sokurov we can vie with Western filmmakers.

At the moment, not all is well with our film geniuses. We are still living with the gradually fading light following Tarkovsky's death. Until recently his unique presence set the standard of spirituality (a purely Russian notion!) toward which all our directors tended, for they had before their eyes an example of supreme craftsmanship, philosophic profundity and artistic obsession. We *now see only rare reflections of his style in the works of such* diverse directors as Ivan Dykhovichny (*Black Monk*), Alexander Kaidanovsky *(The Kerosene Seller's Wife)* and Konstantin Lopushansky (*A Dead Man's Letters* and *A Museum Visitor*).

And yet a certain phenomenal beginning is alive in our cinema. But if it ever dies it will not be for lack of dollars, because there will always be some eccentric filmmaker who would rather make his film without proper financing.

Ideas put forth by such eccentric people constitute, in their entirety, a spiritual basis of our present quests: the naïve avant-gardists from Leningrad and Moscow (such as the Aleynikov brothers, Pyotr Pospelov, Boris Yukhananov, Vadim Drapkin, Eugeny Chorba and Eugeny Kondratjev) who search intuitively, gropingly for new forms in the film and video mediums; or Sergei Selyanov, whose film *The Nameday* is a rare example of a truly Russian, Platonov-style naïveté on the screen. When one sees the central character, a happy eccentric sleeping on a worn sofa filled with letters, there is no room left for sociological analysis and political schemes.

When Sergei Ovcharov, employing a purely Russian folklore style, makes a free screen version of prose works by the nineteenth-century Russian satirist Saltykov-Schedrin, transplanting plots of his works into present-day surroundings and turning the writer's prose into a bright assemblage of styles originating from diverse art periods, I cannot but chide at Ovcharov for this effluence of form and repetitiveness of tricks. But at the same time I cannot help lying back: not everything has been exhausted, broken or degenerated.

Tarkovsky said in *Stalker* that weakness is force. This is our principle: weakness as selfless rejection of pragmatism can make art really viable, in spite of the stiffer rules of the game.

I will stop believing in *peresfroika,* including the cinema, only when I am tragically confident that everything is over, that no one will ever be able to unearth a treasure and discover a talent that, as a rule, lies dormant, unaware of its own worth. Now I am confident that there is a lot of unearthing to be done. It is only our sloth that makes us uncertain as to where to start digging.

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Notes on Contributors

MICHAEL BRASHINSKY teaches film and drama at the University of New Orleans. His *The Zero Hour: Glasnost and Soviet Cinema in Transition* and *The Russians are Coming! The Best of Soviet Film Criticism, 1985–1990* (both with Andrew Horton) are forthcoming.

GIOVANNI BUTTAFAVA (1939–1990) was a scholar and translator of Russian literature. He was film critic for the magazine *L'Espresso,* and his publications included *Storia della letteratura russa* (1969) and *Antologia della letteratura russa* (2nd edition 1985).

SYLVIE DALLET teaches history at the University of Paris X in Nanterre. She is a specialist on the subject of cinema and history, and has published numerous articles in specialized journals *(Cinémaction, Revue du cinéma, Film et histoire, Études)*. She is the editor of Gueves révolutionnaires (Histoire et cinéma) (1984).

JOHN B.DUNLOP is a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution where he conducts scholarly research in the areas of Russian nationalism, cultural politics and the politics of religion. His publications include *The New Russian Nationalism* (1985), and he is co-editor of *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* and *Solzhenitsyn in Exile* (1985).

HERBERT EAGLE is Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and film at the University of Michigan. He served as Director of the Film and Video Program. He has contributed articles to specialized journals including *Semiotica, Slavic and East European Journal, Cross-Currents* and *Wide Angle*. He is the editor of *Russian Formalist Film Theory* (1981).

MARC FERRO is Directeur d'Études at l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and director of IMSECO (Institut d'Études sur l'URSS, l'Europe Centrale et Orientale). His

numerous works include *Cinéma et Histoire* (1976) *and L'Histoire sous surveillance* (1985), and he has produced several films on world history.

ALEXANDER GERSHKOVICH was Senior Scholar at the Institute of the History of Arts in Moscow from 1958 to 1971; since 1982 he has been Research Fellow at the Harvard Russian Research Center. His publications include *The Theater of Yuri Lyubimov* (1989).

VAL GOLOVSKOY worked as a film critic in the Soviet Union, and is currently Language Instructor at the Foreign Service Institute, Washington, DC. His publications include *Behind the Soviet Screen: The Motion Picture Industry in the USSR, 1972–1982* (with John Rimberg) (1986).

PETER KENEZ is Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His publications include *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920* (1977) and *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (1985).

VANCE KEPLEY, JR, is Associate Professor of Film and Chair of the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of *In the Service of the State: The Cinema of Alexander Dovzhenko* (1986).

ANNA LAWTON is Professorial Lecturer at Georgetown University, where she teaches the history of Soviet cinema. A specialist in Russian literature and film, she has published numerous articles, and her books include *From Futurism to Imaginism* (1981), *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes* (1988) and, forthcoming, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*. She is the film editor for *Russian Review* and a member of the National Gallery Advisory Film Committee.

HERBERT MARSHALL studied with Eisenstein in Moscow. He distinguished himself as an author, film-maker and scholar, and his publications include *Mayakovsky* (1965) and *Immoral Memories* (1983).

LINO MICCICHÉ is Professor of Film History at the University of Siena. Founder of the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, honorary chairman of the Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique and chairman of the Italian Association of Film Critics, his publications include *Film '81* (1981) and *L'incubo americano: il cinema di Robert Altman* (1985).

ANNETTE MICHELSON is Professor of Film Studies at New York University. She is a member of the National Gallery Advisory

Film Committee and editor of the journal *October,* and her publications include *Kino-Eye, The Writings of Dziga Ventov* (1984).

FRANÇOISE NAVAILH has a PhD from l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and has published numerous articles in books and periodicals such as *Film et histoire* (1984), *Cinéma et judéité* (1986), and *Europe 45/65* (1987).

VLADA PETRIC is Professor of Cinema at Harvard University. He studied theater and film in Belgrade and Moscow, and his publications include *Constructivism in Film* (1989). His experimental film *Light-Play: A Tribute to Moholy-Nagy* received a prize at the Sinking Creek Festival (1987).

PETER SHEPOTINNIK studied at the National Film School in Moscow and is editor of the foreign department of *Iskusstvo kino,* the leading Soviet film journal. He is also a host of a popular television show, 'Kino-Serpantin'.

RICHARD TAYLOR is Senior Lecturer in Politics and Russian Studies at the University College of Swansea. He has published widely on Soviet cinema, and is currently working on a political history of Soviet cinema in the 1930s and a biography of Eisenstein. He co-edited *The Film Factory* (1988), and his publications include *The Politics of Soviet Cinema, 1917–1929* (1979).

KRISTIN THOMPSON is an Honorary Fellow of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her publications include *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible': A Neoformalist Analysis* (1981), and *Breaking the Glass Armor* (1988). She is currently working on a study of European avant-garde cinema of the 1920s.

JOSEPH TRONCALE is Associate Professor of Russian at the University of Richmond and the director of Russian studies. He specializes in nineteenth-century Russian literature and Soviet cinema. In recent years he has concentrated on the work of Grigory Kozintsev.

DENISE J.YOUNGBLOOD is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Vermont. She is the author of *Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, 1918–1935* (1985) and the forthcoming *Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s*.

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